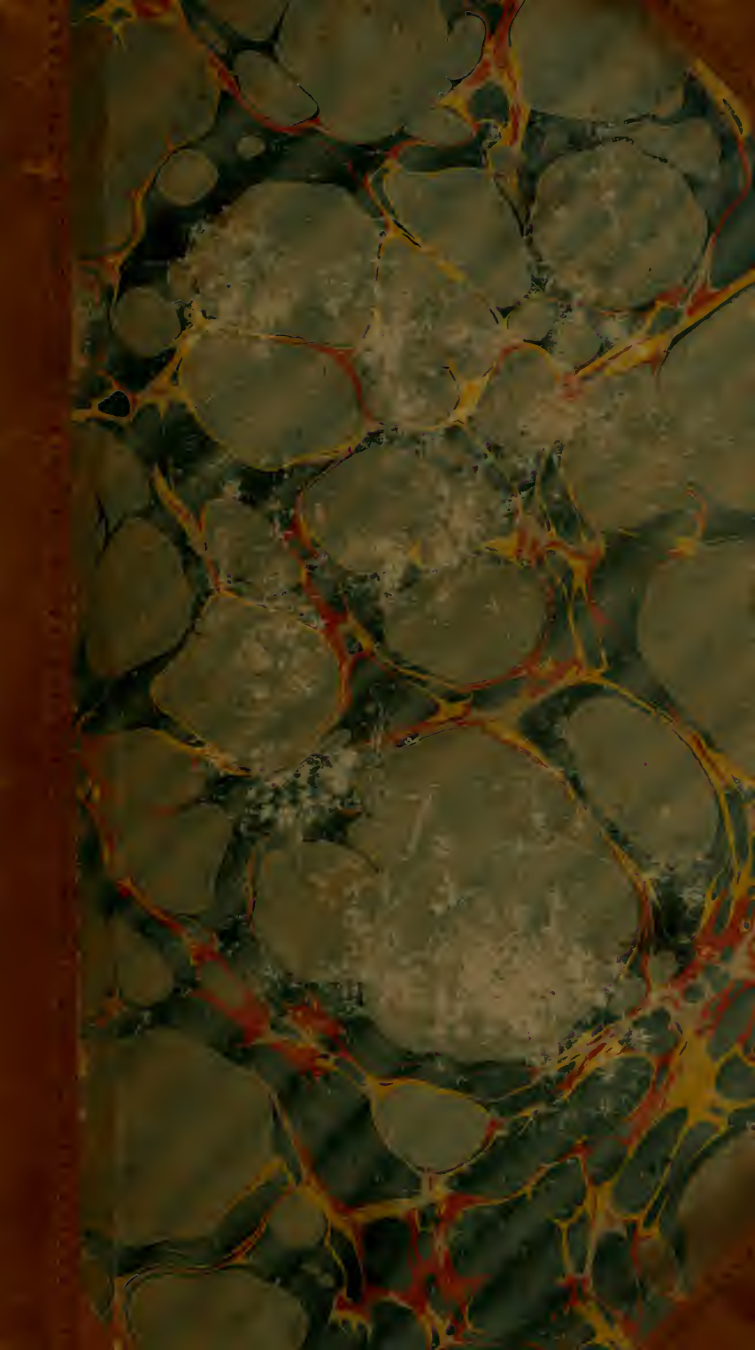
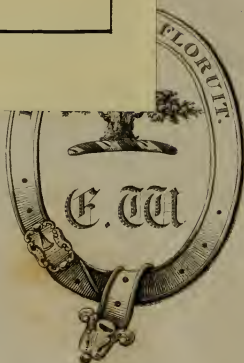






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G. H. Hutton

THE
LIFE AND ADVENTURES
OF
JOHN MARSTON HALL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"DARNLEY," "RICHELIEU," "HENRY MASTERTON,"
"MARY OF BURGUNDY," &c.

"Wo viel Licht ist, ist stärker Schatten!"
Götz von Berlichingen.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

THE convalescence of Laura de Villardin proceeded rapidly, and she was soon able to take the air in the huge lumbering coach of those times, which was a very different sort of machine from the gay and gilded equipages of the present day. I was always selected to carry her from her couch to the carriage; and no one suspecting that our feelings would ever become dangerous to our own peace, our childish partiality only excited a smile on the part of Monsieur de Villardin, and was the source of no small pleasure to ourselves. As she acquired strength, it was decided by her physician that exercise on horseback would complete her re-

covery; and I sought and obtained the task both of breaking a horse for her service and teaching her to ride. She was then as sweet a girl as ever I beheld, and each day was adding new graces to her person and to her mind. Her heart was as gentle and as kind as that of Madame de Villardin, and she had a degree of the same graceful playfulness, which I had observed in her mother when first I saw her, mingled with the deeper and more intense feelings, which — misguided and abused — had been the cause of misery in her father's bosom.

The hours fled in great happiness for nearly three months, but at length the time for renewing the military operations against the Spaniards approached, and messengers from the court warned Monsieur de Villardin that his presence was required at head quarters.

It was necessary, of course, to obey the summons, and all our preparations were speedily concluded. Laura and the whole household were removed to the Pres Vallée before our departure, in order that masters might be obtained from Reunes to instruct Mademoiselle de Vil-

lardin in all those accomplishments which were required in society, from a person of her rank, and as my little page, Clement de la Marke, was too young to accompany me to the tented field, I left him under the care of Father Ferdinand, in order that he might derive every advantage from the same facility of procuring instruction.

Before we quitted Dumont, however, Monsieur de Villardin, who never left any service I did him unrequited, proposed to give me in exchange, for the very uncertain pension which the government had bestowed upon me, a farm which lay contiguous to Juvigny, and which certainly rendered my baronial lands of a very respectable extent. I pointed out to the Duke that the present rents of the farm were far more than the amount of the pension, and that it was likely to yield still more; but he insisted upon the arrangement; and I clearly saw that he wished to recompense the assistance I had afforded him at the Hôtel de Ville, without rendering his gift burdensome, by bestowing it in the shape of a reward.

As I knew well that fully one half of his income remained unemployed; and had long learned to look upon him as a father, his benefits had nothing galling in them to any of the weaknesses of my nature; and I willingly accepted his offer. The necessary papers were drawn up and signed, ere we set out for the army; and I need hardly say that the benefit conferred did not excite the less gratitude in my bosom, because the donation was delicately veiled under the semblance of an exchange.

It will be unnecessary to follow the armies of France through the campaign that ensued, or to trace my own individual career in the service, which was simply that of a young officer, possessed of considerable interest, who rose more by fortunate circumstances, and the exertions of a few indefatigable friends, than by any particular credit of his own. It is true that I was active and vigilant, and did not want courage; but at the same time I cannot but acknowledge that both Monsieur de Villardin and Monsieur de Turenne made more of those qualities in my person than they deserved.

After having followed the royal army through all its marches and countermarches, after having done what I could to distinguish myself at the siege of Rhetel and of Mouson, and after having taken part in the deliverance of Rocroy, I returned to Brittany with Monsieur de Villardin, at the end of the campaign, considerably richer in honour than I had set out.

Every thing at the Pres Vallée was as we left it; or so nearly so, that it seemed as if that part of the world had stood still, while we had been hurried through so many different scenes and events. Father Ferdinand appeared hardly changed in the least; and though Laura had grown taller, she was still a girl. My little page, indeed, had greatly improved; and in the couple of months that we spent at the château wound himself not only round my heart, but also round that of Monsieur de Villardin himself; and when, at our departure, he petitioned earnestly to be taken with us, I thought that the Duke himself seemed inclined to second his request.

Judging it better for himself, however, I left

him for another year, and proceeded with Monsieur de Villardin to attend the coronation of the young king, a summons to which ceremony had curtailed our stay in Brittany.

During the festivities that succeeded, Monsieur de Villardin became first acquainted with the Count de Laval, of whom I shall have more to speak hereafter. He was, as every one knows, wealthy and powerful ; and though he was cold and somewhat haughty, yet he was, I believe, a man of generous feelings, and a noble disposition, of which I had ultimately an extraordinary proof. He paid considerable attention to Monsieur de Villardin ; and it struck me from the first that he had some motive with which I was not aware in the advances that he made towards the Duke.

To myself, he always showed himself polite, though distant ; and I was glad to find, as his acquaintance with Monsieur de Villardin advanced, that he was not inclined to assume a degree of superiority in his manners towards me which I might not have been disposed to tolerate. He was, as I have said, somewhat

haughty in his manners to every one, but certainly not more so towards myself than towards others.

Soon after the coronation we again quitted the court and joined the army, which began its operations by the siege of Stenay. The Prince de Condé and the Spanish troops having attempted to draw us away, by the attack of Arras, Monsieur de Turenne marched to its relief, leaving Monsieur de Faber to carry on the works against Stenay. I remained with the army of the latter till the capitulation of the place, after which we rejoined Turenne. No sooner was the junction of the two armies effected, than it was determined to attack the lines before Arras, which was accordingly done; and, notwithstanding the cabals of several of our own officers, and the gallantry and skill of Condé, the Spanish entrenchments were forced at several points, and the enemy obliged to retire precipitately to Cambray. The campaign then proceeded with uninterrupted success, several frontier towns were taken, and, at length, after a year of glory, Turenne dispersed

his troops in winter-quarters, and Monsieur de Villardin returned to Brittany.

For my own part, I was rewarded for any little services that I might have performed, by receiving the government of the small town of Binches, and took possession of my new command with no small pride and pleasure. The duties, however, thus imposed upon me, of course, prevented my usual journey into Brittany; and although, in the midst of the winter, I obtained leave to visit Paris, and spent several pleasant days with my friend and benefactor, Lord Masterton, yet, when I came to resume my command, it began to seem tiresome and irksome, and I soon found that I would a great deal rather have been in Brittany than at Binches. I longed to see Laura and Father Ferdinand, and my little page, and all the old familiar faces of the château; to spend the days of winter and spring in the sports of the field and the busy idleness of country occupations, and the evenings in reading or in conversation with those whose thoughts and feelings flowed habitually in the same current with my own. Instead of all this I had

nothing but the petty state and dull routine which follows the governor of a small town ; and all I could do to amuse myself was comprised in keeping a continual watch upon the enemy's frontier, and making such little expeditions as the nature of my command permitted.

In these enterprises I occasionally met with some adventures that afforded me entertainment ; but the only event worth relating, perhaps, was the capture of two persons whom I have had occasion to mention more than once. A truce of a few weeks had been concluded in the early part of spring, and I did all that I could to secure to the inhabitants of the frontier lands even a short space of tranquillity ; but I soon found that the inactivity of both armies was seized by the hordes of marauders, which a long war had called into being, as an opportunity for pillage and exaction. I was instructed, if possible, to punish some of these bands of plunderers ; and having heard of some movements on the part of the enemy, although the truce was not yet at an end, I sent out a party to reconnoitre, who fell in with a body of

Spaniards and Germans, and in a charge took about half-a-dozen officers and soldiers, amongst whom were the two leaders of the adverse troop. The prisoners were immediately brought into Binches, followed by a crowd of the peasantry of the neighbouring villages, who charged them loudly with being mere plunderers and assassins, and accused them of a number of acts, certainly not very honourable to the military character.

All this was reported to me by the officer who took them, and who, at the same time, laid before me a number of articles of a very miscellaneous description, which had been found upon their persons, or amongst their baggage, and which tended strongly to confirm the charges made by the peasantry. Learning upon enquiry that the two leaders were Frenchmen, and knowing, as I have mentioned, that, under the pretext of the war, a most disgraceful system of rapine and robbery was carried on upon the frontier, which system I had been commanded to put down by the most severe measures, I determined sternly to hang one of

these gentlemen before the gate of the town,—an act which I was authorised to perform by my own instructions, and which had more than once been executed by the Spanish officers under similar circumstances.

Resolving to make them draw lots for the fate to which I destined one of them, I ordered them to be brought before me; but my purpose was suddenly changed when I beheld in the two culprits my old acquaintances, Gaspard de Belleville, and his good brother-in-law, Captain Hubert, who seemed to have thoroughly initiated his sister's husband into the mystery of appropriating the property of other people. What were the peculiar bonds that united them so strongly together I never enquired; although, as I knew that their connection by means of Suzette was not likely to be a very inseparable link, I judged that a similarity of tastes and pursuits, as well as interests and necessities, made them co-operate with the friendly zeal which seemed to actuate them.

Of course, from what I knew of the cha-

racters of both, I was the more inclined to give implicit credence to the charges brought against the prisoners; but, at the same time, I saw that if I proceeded as I had at first intended, the many causes of enmity that existed between myself and Gaspard de Belleville might give the act of justice, which I had proposed to perform, the aspect of a base and cowardly piece of revenge. I had by this time learned that it is not sufficient for any man only to *do* right, but that where the two are compatible he must *seem* to do right also, in justice to his own character and in deference to the opinion of that great earthly judge, mankind; and I consequently resolved to wave my right of punishing the plunderers myself, lest the example should lose half its effect by being attributed to wrong motives. I caused, however, the whole evidence to be recapitulated in their presence; and, turning to Gaspard de Belleville, I said, “ You hear, sir, the charge against you, and before seeing you I had determined that you should expiate the crimes you have committed by the sacrifice of your

life. As, however, there are various circumstances which have occurred at different times between you and me which might give such an act the colouring of revenge, I shall send you and your companion there, back in chains to the Prince de Condé, with a full statement of the case, and will then trust to his Highness's sense of justice to punish you as you deserve."

Gaspard de Belleville turned deadly pale at the first part of my speech, and he attempted to curl his lip into a sneer as I concluded; but the effort was not successful, and only ended in a grimace, wherein the expression of apprehension was still greatly predominant over that of contempt. As to his worthy brother-in-law, his bold bearing remained unquelled; and, remembering me perfectly, though many years had now passed since our first meeting in the forest, he boldly claimed acquaintance with me — evidently more from a spirit of daring than from any other feeling — and replied, "that he was sure I would never have the heart to hang an old friend in his situation."

He spoke with a sort of impudent smile: but,

holding the command that I did in the town, I did not choose to bandy jests with him in presence of all my officers; and ordering him and his companion to be removed, I caused the testimony of the peasants to be put down and properly attested; and sent the culprits in irons, accompanied by a flag of truce, to the Prince de Condé, who was at that time in the neighbourhood of Mons. At the same time, I informed his Highness by letter, not only of the facts which accompanied the capture of the prisoners, but of the motives which induced me to act as I did, stating simply and sincerely, without fear or reservation, the determination I had originally formed, and my reasons for not putting it in execution.

I felt sure that such conduct would be appreciated by the Prince, nor was I deceived; for though, in a letter which I received from his Highness in reply, he said, in a gay tone, that he had too few friends to hang any of them himself, yet he assured me that he would immediately dismiss from his service two men that had so disgraced the cause to which they

had attached themselves. This the officer, who had carried them to his quarters, informed me he had executed in presence of all his staff, and had at the same time expressed the highest approbation of my conduct throughout the affair.

Though, in my progress through life, I had lost a great deal of that taste for bitter enmities with which I had set out in my boyhood, yet, I confess, I did not feel the least apprehension from a knowledge that two men, who viewed me with mortal hatred, had been turned loose upon the world, although the officer added, that, before quitting the presence of the Prince de Condé, they had expressed the most resolute determination to find means of avenging themselves upon me.

This little incident, which possessed some degree of interest while it lasted, was soon forgotten, and all the weariness of my command began to return ; but, without knowing it, my governorship of Binches was drawing towards a close. About a fortnight after the capture of Gaspard and his companions, I received a letter

from Monsieur le Tellier, which, from its very cordial and friendly commencement,—very different in style and form from the generality of official communications,—I clearly saw was destined, ere its close, to demand some service, or to require some sacrifice. I was not disappointed; for after a number of high commendations, and promises of future advancement, the worthy minister went on to inform me that there was a young protégé of the Cardinal greatly in want of some appointment, and that, if I were inclined to resign my government in his favour, it would be immediately beneficial to him, and ultimately beneficial to myself. To render what the minister believed would be a bitter draught more palatable, he added an immense quantity of the universal sweetener, flattery, telling me that the Cardinal had the less hesitation in making this request, as it would be impossible for the King to suffer so distinguished an officer as myself to remain in the inactivity of a small government after the armies were called into the field for the next campaign; and, as a more substantial induce-

ment, he offered to grant me immediately a higher grade in the army, upon my resignation of the governorship of Binches.

I took very good care, as it may be easily conceived, not to let the minister know, by my reply, how tired I was of the post I occupied, and how desirous I was of returning to Brittany for the two months that were yet likely to elapse before the opening of the campaign. On the contrary, I quietly pointed out how inadequate the new rank offered me was, when viewed as an equivalent to the governorship: but, at the same time, I expressed my perfect willingness to do any thing which could oblige or give pleasure to the Cardinal Prime Minister; and I ended by assuring Monsieur le Tellier that, as soon as I received the commission giving the rank he promised, I would send him my resignation of the government in favour of the gentleman he pointed out.

This reply speedily produced a rejoinder, enclosing my commission, thanking me repeatedly for my prompt acquiescence, and promising great things for the future. Extremely well

pleased with the whole affair, though very well convinced that the Cardinal would soon find means of forgetting all his promises, I drew up my resignation in due form, and presented it with my own hands to Monsieur le Tellier. My successor was instantly sent to Binches; and, without lingering in Paris a moment more than was necessary, I set out for Brittany alone, leaving my servants and baggage to follow,—preferring still above all things the sort of rapid and independent mode of proceeding, to which I had been accustomed before state, or rank, or fortune, entitled, enabled, or required me to burden myself with followers or attendants.

My journey, as I rode my own horse, was less rapid than many of those which I had previously made to and from the same spot; but it was a far more pleasant one. Looking upon the house of Monsieur de Villardin as my home, and upon his household as my family, I experienced fully as much pleasure in the prospect of rejoining him as if his blood had flowed in my veins. I felt greatly relieved, too, by the resignation of an irksome office; and, with

a sensation of liberty and independence which I had never known while chained, as it were, to the walls of Binches, I rode on through a rich and varying country, which, throughout the whole of my journey, was lighted up by the sweet fresh sunshine of the spring, and which at every step afforded new and beautiful traces of the cessation of anarchy and civil war, and the return of industry and security.

It was evening when I reached Rennes, but there still wanted an hour or two of night; and as my horse was extremely tired I left him at the auberge, and walked on by the bank of the stream towards the Près Vallée. The calm sweet meadows, the magnificent woods that surrounded them, the still silvery river that wandered through the midst, all seemed more tranquilly solemn than usual. A feeling of soft repose pervaded the whole scene, while the beams of the setting sun, pouring between the bolls of the giant trees, and streaming amidst the green transparent leaves of the young spring, cheered away every trace of gloom, and left it all still and peaceful, though any thing

but gay. Although I was going to those I loved, and delighted in the thought of seeing them again, yet the many feelings of my heart, the memories of the past, the hopes of the future, the enjoyment of the present, all, perhaps, tended to make me linger as I wandered on through a scene that seemed to blend and harmonise with every mingled emotion of my bosom.

I had passed the second and third sweep of trees, had crossed the fourth savanna, and had entered the fourth grove, when I heard some one speaking, and, looking forward, I saw two female figures under one of the trees which bordered the meadow I was just about to cross. They were evidently enjoying the evening sunshine, the one standing with her arm leaning against the old elm that overhung their heads, the other seated on a bench which had been placed at its foot. I had no difficulty in recognising in the first my old acquaintance Lise, the *suivante* of Mademoiselle de Villardin, but I could scarcely believe that the other was her young mistress. It seemed but a day since

I had left her a mere child; at least so gradual had been the change up to the time of my last departure, that to me she had seemed but little older than when first I knew her. Now, however, there was a change indeed. Even before I saw her face, the full rounded contour of her whole form, the very fall of her figure, still replete with grace and beauty — but, oh, so different from the grace of childhood — prepared me for an alteration, or rather made me doubt that it could be herself; but when my step caught her ear, and she turned towards me, I paused in surprise. It was certainly the face of Laura de Villardin — every feature was there, but yet so splendidly changed. The full ruby lip, the dark bright eye, the long black lashes, the sunny cheek, were all before me, as I had known them for years: but there was a new soul in them all — a light, a feeling, that left them as different as it is possible to conceive; and yet the general expression too was the same — innocent, natural, playful. The features, however, had also become more formed: they had lost every remains of what one may call the shapelessness

of childhood, and had acquired all the chiseled symmetry of young maturity.

As I have said, I could scarcely believe my eyes, and I paused; but I soon found that, however changed in form, she was in no degree changed in mind, or heart, or feelings. I was scarcely altered: she saw in me alone the dear companion of her childhood, — the boy who had saved her own and her father's life; and as soon as her eyes rested on me she started up and cast herself into my arms, exactly as she had done when she was seven years old. The same affection that she had felt through life beamed up in her eyes: the same joy to see me again, which she had always manifested, sparkled over her countenance; and the same endearing terms of unreserved regard, and delighted welcome, hung upon her lips. It is impossible to describe all that I felt, and indeed I did not stay to analyse it at the time. I pressed her to my heart as a sister, and, kissing her cheek, led her back to her seat. But as she sat down again, and I took my place beside her, a growing blush seemed to

tell that for the first time she remembered that she was no longer a child.

It passed away again in a moment; and I was glad to find that, however she settled the matter with her own heart, she was determined to let the change be no change to me. My good friend Lise, too, was delighted to see me; and though eight or nine years had certainly made a considerable difference in her since first I saw her, she had lost none of her native kindness of heart, or cheerfulness of disposition. She loaded me with a thousand questions, admired my dress, declared that I was turning more handsome every year; and called upon Laura for an opinion in regard to my beauty, which roused Mademoiselle de Villardin from a deep reverie into which she had fallen, and which ended in another blush.

It was now her turn to ask questions; and many did she put, though in a very different strain from those of Lise. They were all questions of affection and interest in my fate and happiness, without a touch of curiosity; and when she heard that I had resigned the

petty government that I had held, and was at liberty to remain with Monsieur de Villardin as before, I shall not easily forget the joy that beamed out of her beautiful eyes.

It would make her father so very, very happy, she said ; for he had often regretted my absence, and had never seemed so cheerful since I had been away. Often, too, she told me, he had blamed himself for advising me to accept the post I had taken, and which he declared was unworthy of my merits ; and she added many another little trait from which she herself had divined, and which led me to believe also, that Monsieur de Villardin had long been anxious for my return. Neither Laura nor myself, however, did any thing to hasten our walk to the château, from which we were nearly a mile distant. The scene was so sweet and calm, and the evening so warm and fine, that it might well invite us to tarry : but there was a sensation of delight in our first conversation after so long a separation, which we were unwilling to cut short ; and a feeling of happiness, too, in the almost unwitnessed enjoyment of each

other's society, which, as it might be long ere the same pleasure was renewed, we were both glad to prolong.

At length, however, the purple hues that began to spread over the sky warned us that we must bend our steps homeward; and Lise, though she had no small touch of romance in her nature, declared that Monsieur would be anxious if Mademoiselle did not return. Laura rose, and, leaning on my arm, took the way along the river, whose glossy bosom was reflecting, bright but softened, the trees, and the banks, and the changing sky above. Our eyes now met, and now rested on the waters; our conversation flew from subject to subject, like a butterfly in a flower-garden, — now poured on uninterrupted, now dropped altogether, and gave place to thought. She told me again and again how glad my return would make every one in the château, leaving me to include herself in the number; and I thought how beautiful she had grown, and remembered how dear and amiable she always

had been. At length the grey turrets and slated roofs of the château rose over the nearest trees ; and one of the sweetest and the happiest walks ended that ever I enjoyed through life.

CHAPTER II.

As my negotiations with Monsieur le Tellier concerning the resignation of the governorship had been carried on too rapidly to admit of my writing to Monsieur de Villardin by any of the ordinary couriers, my arrival at the Près Vallée was unexpected; and when, from the windows of the library, he beheld his daughter leaning on the arm of a young cavalier, whose face he could not distinguish in the grey of the evening as we crossed the terrace, his surprise was so great that he came out to the steps of the château to meet us. His pleasure appeared hardly less than his astonishment when he recognised me; and Lise having entered the house, the tidings soon spread through the household; so that, while Monsieur de Villardin was giving me a glad welcome, I had my little page Clement le Marke, old Jerome Laborde, and half a dozen of the ancient domestics, turned out

upon the terrace to greet my arrival, not knowing that Monsieur de Villardin himself had come forth to do me that honour.

The Duke smiled when he saw them; and, still holding my hand, which he had taken at our first meeting, he led me in, saying, — “ You see what a favourite you are, my dear boy: but I will have my turn now; and, indeed, I am almost jealous of Laura for having forestalled me in giving you welcome.”

His manner was that of an affectionate father receiving a well-beloved son after a long absence; and as, notwithstanding the propensity of human nature to presume upon kindness, I never entirely forgot that I had been a friendless orphan, destitute and lonely, it may be easily imagined what feelings such tenderness inspired. When we had entered the library, Monsieur de Villardin seated himself at the table with Laura by his side, and with his hand leaning on her shoulder; and they both gazed upon me so intently, as I sat opposite to them, as almost to make me smile.

“ Well, well,” said Monsieur de Villardin

at length, “ you are not much changed since I saw you ; though a good deal, I dare say, in the eyes of Laura.”

Mademoiselle de Villardin, however, declared that I was not changed in the least ; and, indeed, would fain have persuaded her father that I was exactly the same in appearance as when I had saved her from drowning at Dumont, some eight or nine years before.

“ It has come upon you gradually, Laura,” replied her father ; “ but now, tell me, De Juvigny, how came you here, and in whose hands have you left your government ? ”

I explained to him the whole particulars ; which, as he well knew the grasping spirit of Mazarin, did not at all surprise him : nor did the arrangement, I believe, displease him at heart ; for, after a comment or two on the injustice of the proceeding, and a promise to use his influence in order to obtain for me something equivalent to that which I had lost, he added,—“ But I will take care—that it shall be nothing that will separate us again ; for your absence has been a loss to me which I scarcely

thought any thing could now prove, at least in such a degree. That I should feel it deeply, however, is not at all astonishing; for I think, De Juvigny, it is now between nine and ten years since first we met; and, during that time, we have never before been separated for many months, except when you were in prison at Stenay. I think, too, that, during that time, you have accumulated upon my head more obligations than ever one man before conferred upon another. You have been my confidant, my adviser, my friend, and my constant companion; so that I may well feel your absence as a loss which the society of even my dear child can scarcely compensate."

"There now, my dear brother," cried Laura, using an epithet which she often employed towards me; "have I not a right to be jealous of you? and, indeed," she added, "I should almost be jealous of your little page, too, who has completely supplanted both my father's other pages in his affection, were I not as fond of the dear boy myself."

Almost as she spoke, Clement himself en-

tered the library, bounding up to my knee with that sort of bold and undismayed step, which showed me clearly upon what very unceremonious terms he had established himself in the family of Monsieur de Villardin. He was greatly changed in his appearance since I had last seen him, though he was still as fine a boy as ever I beheld; and as tall, as strong, and as well proportioned as many boys of eleven or twelve, although he could not be, at that time, so much as nine years old. There was, too, in his whole appearance, an air of graceful ease — a sort of natural dignity — which was extraordinary in one so young; and I felt very sure, from his whole demeanour, that he had been informed by some one, that his rank and station in society was equal to that of those with whom he was called to mix. The time he had spent at the Près Vallée had certainly not been thrown away; for I soon found that my little page was already a more accomplished scholar than myself; and I easily perceived, from the manner in which he executed all that he had learned of military ex-

ercises, that he wanted but habit, discipline, and experience to become eventually one of the best soldiers of the day.

I had always been kind to him during the few months we spent together every year; and, looking upon him but as a younger son of the same adventurous family with myself, I had treated him perhaps as a favourite brother. This had, of course, rendered him fond of me; and his manner towards me was every thing that I could desire. There was no want of respect, though it was the respect of affection and esteem; and, though he was frank and bold, telling me at once his thoughts, his opinions, and his wishes, yet it was done with that air of natural confidence and candour that rendered it infinitely pleasing; while, at the same time, he yielded to my wishes or my arguments as if he felt a pleasure in doing what I bade him, and in giving up his mind to my direction. Whether the affection of my mind that he gained upon his side was vanity, self-love, or any more noble feeling, I cannot tell, but certainly he wound himself completely round my

heart; though, to say the truth, during the six weeks that I remained at the Près Vallée, I was very little with him.

Other feelings and other pursuits gradually took possession of me altogether; — feelings which I did not understand, and would not examine, — pursuits, the tendency of which I did not perceive, and the result of which I dared not calculate. From some early prejudice, Monsieur de Villardin had the utmost hatred at the very thought of a *gouvernante* for his daughter; and though, for the form's sake, he had often declared that he must procure one, — though many of his female relations had reasoned with him upon the subject, and had held up before his eyes all the customs and respects of the world which require such a proceeding, — yet no step had been taken to that effect; and Laura de Villardin, now in her sixteenth year, remained in her father's house with no other female attendants than Lise, her principal maid, and two or three ordinary tiring-women. Masters for all sorts of accomplishments visited her from Rennes

every morning ; but from two o'clock till the hour of repose her time was all her own ; and it was now divided between her father and myself. The vigour, however, of Monsieur de Villardin was beginning to be impaired ; and, though he was still a strong and powerful man for his time of life, yet a degree of inactivity, when no great excitement prompted to exertion, showed that years began to lay as a burden upon him. Thus the walks and rides of Laura de Villardin, before my arrival, had often been taken alone, or only followed when on horseback, by some servants, or when on foot, by her attendant Lise. Now, indeed, the matter was changed, and I became her constant companion in the rambles which before might be considered as solitary. It never seemed to strike Monsieur de Villardin that any feeling which might be dangerous to his other views, or to our peace, could spring out of such constant association. Doubtless he thought that, having grown up together from very early years, our feelings would ever remain those of a brother and sister ; or, perhaps,

he never thought about it at all. No impediment, however, did he ever throw in our way; but, on the contrary, whenever he felt any indisposition himself, he was the first to send me with her on any excursion that she proposed to take, and more than once reminded me that, at a very early age, I had pledged myself to be her protector and defender throughout the years of youth.

Thus it was that, during the six weeks that I now staid at the Près Vallée, I was, for at least one half of each day, in the constant society of Laura de Villardin. A considerable portion, indeed, of that time was spent in company with her father; but I may say, no day passed without her being alone with me, either wandering with her arm in mine through the fair scenes round us, or reading together some tale of ancient lore, or sitting at the foot of some tree, and enjoying the beautiful spring for at least two or three hours.

It must not be thought that knowingly and wilfully I took advantage of these opportunities to steal the heart of the young heiress of such

broad lands and splendid possessions. I have before said that I did not and would not examine what I was doing, or what was likely to be the result either with herself or me. There was no calculation in the business, no consideration, no forethought. The fascination was too strong for reflection. Her society was delightful to me, as it always had been ; and I enjoyed it as I had ever done, without knowing that it could become dangerous. The only thing, I am confident, that even for a moment could have caused a suspicion in either her bosom or mine of what was really passing in our hearts, were the feelings which accompanied our first meetings in the mornings. It had always been her custom — a custom sanctioned by the universal habits of France — after turning from her father's salutation and embrace, to welcome me in the same manner: and whenever we had been in the same dwelling, from our childhood up to that hour, not a day had passed without my lips being pressed upon her cheek, while her fair hand rested in mine, and her sweet voice gave me the good-morrow.

Now, however, I perhaps experienced feelings, at the moment of our morning meeting, which should have told me more. A thrill passed through me as her hand touched mine; my heart beat as our eyes met, and I ought to have felt that the kiss was no longer that of a brother. But it is wonderful how blind people become under such circumstances, and, I say the truth, upon my honour, when I say that I did not know that deep and passionate love was growing up in my heart towards Laura de Villardin. If Monsieur de Villardin calculated at all upon the same feelings which had animated us in infancy remaining still unchanged, he calculated not only most wrongly, but upon false grounds altogether. Such might have been the case had we never been separated; but now, — at the same time that our youthful affection had prepared our hearts to receive gladly every new feeling that bound us to each other — we had been of late years absent from each other for so many months, that each renewal of our intercourse came with the freshness of a new acquaintance, and at length, when I returned

after a more prolonged separation still, I found the sweet girl, who was already so dear to me, sprung up into womanhood : I found her the most lovely and engaging creature I had ever beheld, while admiration was heightened and softened by a thousand tender memories, and long habits of endearing intimacy.

Still, we neither of us knew how rapidly love was gaining on our hearts — still, neither of us made the slightest effort to resist his power, or to avoid his influence. Our lonely walks were the sweetest of our lives ; and, though we were very frequently accompanied by Lise, who probably divined more of our own feelings than we did ourselves ; yet, I must confess that she was the most discreet and friendly of *suivantes*, and contrived to throw no restraint upon our conversations. What those conversations were heaven knows. They were a whirl of bright things ; a mixture of dreams, and thoughts, and feelings, the blendings of passion and imagination, which might altogether form many a page of wild but brilliant nonsense, if I could write down an exact transcript of all that passed.

We were in love with the world, and all that it contained ; and, from the bright feelings that had sprung up within us, every thing around us seemed bright. Our whole sensations were a panegyric upon all that we beheld : the sunshine was gayer than ever sunshine had been before ; the trees were greener — the fields more sweet and fresh ; for us the breeze was loaded with perfume ; for us each flower had some new beauty — some brighter grace. We found it inexhaustible to praise and to admire ; for every thing around offered us the reflex of that happiness, which had so lately arisen in our own bosoms.

Be it remarked, however, that, amongst all the subjects of conversation which we now enjoyed — and they were as varied as the shapes of summer-clouds — that we never talked of love. We spoke of ancient tales, and bright unexampled friendship — the arts and graces of Greece — the virtues and the might of Rome. We spoke of modern days — of gallant deeds in the field — of sad and tragic events — of stories of interest and of anecdotes of wit. We

spoke of the beauties of nature, and of all the fair varieties of the world's face. We spoke of ourselves, and our interests, and our feelings, and our tastes. We spoke of our many associated memories in the past, and we looked forward to many a hope and pleasure together in the future ; but still we never spoke of love. It might be a deep, hidden, internal, unavowed consciousness, concealed from our own eyes as well as from the rest of the world, that made us avoid — I must call it scrupulously — the most distant approach to that one subject, amongst all the rest of which we spoke. It might be that, by some sort of instinctive perception, we trod lightly, because we found that our feet were upon a volcano.

The fire, however, went on within our hearts, though silently. We drank the intoxicating cup to the dregs, without knowing that it was wine. There was none to open our eyes — there was none to warn us ; and, like all other persons in the same situation, we woke not from our dream till it was too late.

Such might not have been the case, had not

the only member of the family who was likely to have given us warning and counsel — to have felt for all our feelings, and foreseen all our danger — had he not been absent during the whole of my stay at the Près Vallée. I allude to Father Ferdinand, who, only two days before my arrival, had set out for Dumont. He did not return as soon as had been expected, and I more than once proposed to ride over to Dumont, and see him ; but there was a fascination at the Près Vallée which detained me with a power not to be resisted, and I put off my expedition from day to day, till at length an order arrived for Monsieur de Villardin and myself to resume our military duties, and we were obliged to prepare for our departure.

The summons came nearly a month sooner than we had expected, and of course caused no small bustle and confusion, especially as Monsieur de Villardin, yielding to the degree of corporeal inactivity, which, as I have before said, was creeping over him, determined to travel to Paris in his carriage, instead of on horseback ; and consequently the time consumed on the

journey was likely to be much greater than usual.

I had on a former occasion promised little Clement de la Marke to take him with me in the next campaign, and although I now felt some scruple at exposing a boy of his tender age to all the dangers and fatigues of a camp, yet he pressed me so vehemently to keep my word with him, that I at length consented; remembering how much more severe had been the hardships that surrounded my own early youth, and believing that the hard school in which my education had commenced had been ultimately of infinite benefit to me through life.

The day appointed for our departure speedily approached, and as it came nearer, the hours spent with Laura became doubly dear; nor indeed did she look less lovely, or less interesting, from a shade of melancholy that spread more and more over her fair face, as every minute that fled took something from the small space of time that we had yet to dream away in each other's society. She never loved parting from her friends, she said; and she knew not why,

but she felt more apprehensive for her father than she had ever before done on his departure for the army. She besought me to be watchful of him, and to persuade him, as much as possible, to keep out of all unnecessary danger; but she said not a word of caution on my part. A thousand little traits, however, let me feel that she was not indifferent to my safety either, and she took great pains to show me how ungenerous and unkind it was towards friends and relations for any soldier to expose himself rashly and carelessly.

At length the day arrived; the horses were put to the carriage, and Monsieur de Villardin, myself, and little Clement, one by one took our leave of Laura and departed. The tears streamed over her cheeks as she bade us adieu, but there was certainly nothing to point out that those tears flowed more painfully than her separation from her father under such circumstances might well justify. Monsieur de Villardin took his seat in one corner of the coach, and I in the other, and little Clement placed himself in the *portière* where he could

more easily see what was passing around. Two other pages accompanied us, and a few attendants on horseback followed, while a number of servants had been sent forward with our chargers, in order to reach the capital by easy journies. The Duke, silent and grave as usual, soon fell into a fit of thought, which lasted uninterrupted during the greater part of the day : the two pages, on the opposite side of the carriage, were as mute as mice, and little Clement, in his portière, was too busily occupied with all the new objects that passed before his eyes, to break in upon our silence by any thing more than a casual exclamation of wonder or pleasure, or by some question, which he generally answered himself, fully to his own satisfaction, before any one else could reply.

My thoughts were busy enough upon subjects which were destined to grow more and more painful under reflection. The first feelings to which I gave way were those of pure sorrow at parting with Laura de Villardin ; and I felt, for the first time in my life, that faint sickness of heart, which I suppose every one

feels in separating from a being so dear—that sensation of a deprivation and a void ; that oppressive sense of the uncertainty of fate, which may ever throw so many obstacles in our way, ere we can again behold those that we so deeply love. Such feelings are painful enough in themselves ; but I soon began to enquire their cause. I had been longer negligent in examining my own heart, and in tracing the latent causes of all that was working in it, than I had been for many years ; but the magic which had withheld my thoughts from every other subject, and which had cast a veil over every other sensation, was now lost ; and my mind naturally turned to enquire what was the real cause of all those new and mingled feelings, which, for six weeks, had been a source of such joy, and which now had left me full of sad thoughts and melancholy forebodings. The truth was no longer to be concealed : the very pain I felt at quitting Laura de Villardin told me that I loved her : the very depression of spirits, and distaste for the career before me, — a career which had formerly occupied all my thoughts and wishes —

now showed me where my hopes and pleasures all centred ; and repeated, in language that I could not doubt, that I loved, and loved too deeply ever to forget.

Such a certainty, under some circumstances, might have so mingled hope and expectation with all the anxieties and apprehensions which follow every strong passion, that the whole would still have remained a pleasant dream to cheer me on upon the path of exertion and enterprise ; but, situated as I was, the tardy discovery alone exposed to my sight a prospect of disappointment and despair. What could I hope ? what could I expect ? I, a poor adventurer, with but the two recommendations of personal courage and noble birth ; I, whose whole possessions on earth were owing to the generosity of others—whose way to fame and distinction had been opened by their kind endeavours ; could I hope to win the heiress of one of the noblest houses and of the most splendid fortunes in all France ; I who had been her father's page ; who owed him every thing—fortune, station, and the means of gain-

ing renown. Oh! what I would have given at that moment to have had the power of changing her I loved into the daughter of some poor gentleman, who would have gladly bestowed her without a portion.

Perhaps for a single instant one of the idle visions of hope broke in with a ray of light, as I remembered to what stations many young men, situated precisely as myself, had risen by energy and good fortune; and especially when I thought of Mondejeu, afterwards Maréchal de Shulemberg, whom I myself recollected an unnoticed page in the house of the Duc de Bouillon, and who by that time had become governor of the important city of Arras, and was in the road to the highest honours of France. But such dreams were speedily at an end; for every way I turned my eyes some new circumstance presented itself, to prove my situation more and more hopeless. The final stroke of all, however, was when I considered what would be the feelings of Monsieur de Villardin, if ever he discovered that I had dared to raise my hopes to the hand of his daughter; and still

more if he were to find that I had attempted by any means to win her affection. Would he not have a right, I asked myself, to accuse me of the basest ingratitude? would he not be entitled to charge me with deceit and hypocrisy? Had I not already in some degree betrayed his trust, unconsciously indeed, but still most foolishly? Ought I not to have looked into my own heart long before; and, judging by what I felt myself, have taken every care to guard against the slightest attempt to inspire the same feelings in the daughter of my benefactor?

I could not but acknowledge that if I had acted wisely or prudently, if I had been as watchful for his interests and for his peace as gratitude and affection ought to have made me, I should have played a different part, and avoided the society of her that I loved. I trusted, however, that it was not too late to remedy my folly. Whatever I had inflicted on myself, however irremediable was the state of disappointment and despair to which I had condemned my own heart, I hoped and be-

lieved that Laura's feelings had been less interested. If, indeed, there had been any thing farther in her sentiments towards me than mere sisterly affection, I trusted that it would soon pass away, and I determined never to see her again till I could command my own demeanour, and behave to her in a very different manner from that in which I had conducted myself of late.

I would try to conquer my passion, I thought, or die. I am afraid the idea of death was uppermost from the beginning, for before we had reached the end of our first day's journey, a dream, of a bright but painful nature, flitted frequently before my imagination. The path of glory and honour I thought was before me, and in the same path lay death, who, with his icy hand, would soon cool all the feverish burning of my heart. How bright, then, would it not be, I asked myself, to out-do in the field all that man had ever done, and to have it told to Laura de Villardin, that I had won immortal honour, and died upon the bed of glory? She would weep for me, I fancied, and her father

would weep ; and if the love I bore her were ever discovered, it would then but serve to shed a brighter light upon my memory, rather than throw a shadow on my name.

CHAPTER III.

IT may easily be conceived that such reveries as those which occupied me during the rest of the journey, produced a sensible effect upon my external demeanour. Men may conceal great schemes and mighty designs, and all those enterprises in which the mind alone is concerned may be hidden by firmness, or covered over by art, but the deep feelings and intense passions of the heart almost always betray their workings by some external sign. It was Clement le Marke who first perceived the alteration, and, hanging upon me affectionately, he enquired what made me so sad. Ere long it caught the attention of Monsieur de Villardin himself; and, without the slightest suspicion of its cause, he spoke of my unusual gravity as if it had arisen from disappointment in regard to the governorship of Binches, and

tried to console me by promising to use every effort to obtain for me a just compensation. Each new instance of his kindness, far from giving me any relief, only served to make me feel more poignantly, that even, did no other circumstances exist to deprive my love of even a chance of success, gratitude to him should teach me to view it with despair. Every thought, every remembrance, showed me more and more strongly that my passion was hopeless; and yet every feeling assured me that that passion was unconquerable, and could never be forgotten. My buoyant heart, which I had thought nothing could overwhelm, completely sunk under the tide of sad thoughts and bitter feelings that overflowed in my bosom during our journey to Paris; and, when we arrived in the capital, I was as reckless a human being as ever despair drove to vice or to folly. What might have been the consequences I cannot tell, for no man should ever trust himself in such a state of mind, had it not been immediately necessary to join the army, and to quit a place in the debaucheries of which I might, perhaps, have

sought relief from the agony that preyed upon my heart.

We arrived in the capital in the morning; and while I remained at our hotel, in a state of gloomy despondency, which seemed to crush all my energies, Monsieur de Villardin proceeded to the court, and returned, after an absence of two hours, with a countenance which plainly showed that he was highly gratified by the reception he had met with. He did not mention what had occurred, however, but merely told me that it would be necessary for me to accompany him to the royal presence the next morning; and, as I cared but little what I did or what I left undone, I assented with the utmost indifference, and followed him when the time came.

After having remained in waiting for a few minutes, we were admitted to the royal presence, and found the king—now grown into one of the handsomest young men I had ever seen—in company with his mother, Cardinal Mazarin, Le Tellier, and a number of other ministers and attendants, in the act of giving audience to a

foreign ambassador, who was taking leave ere his departure. Our reception was most gracious, and I soon found that the pliancy which I had shown in yielding at once to the wishes of the Cardinal, had established my favour, not only with that minister, but with the royal family, on a basis which might have been very advantageous to me had I been disposed to profit by it. As there was no hope, however, of any turn of fortune taking place, sufficiently miraculous in its nature to render a young English adventurer a fit match for the heiress of two noble houses, I was very indifferent to all the rest. I saw with more satisfaction, however, the marks of honour which the court bestowed upon Monsieur de Villardin; and ere we took our leave was gratified by beholding the baton of Field Marshal placed in his hands by the young monarch, with a compliment on his fidelity and military skill, which must have doubled the pleasure that the distinction produced.

After having expressed his thanks, Monsieur de Villardin drew back a step, and presenting

me anew to the king, he added, " I think, Sire, you were graciously pleased to intimate that you had some mark of your royal approbation to bestow upon my young friend, who will, I am sure, do his best to deserve it."

" The commission has not yet received our signature," replied the King, " but it shall be sent to your hotel before your departure tomorrow. In the meantime I doubt not, Monsieur le Maréchal, that you have informed the Baron de Juvigny of my intentions in his favour."

" I did not presume, Sire," replied Monsieur de Villardin, " to forestall the pleasure he would receive from hearing your royal goodness towards him expressed by your own lips."

" You did well, Sir," replied the King. " Monsieur de Juvigny, the honours we confer are always on account of past services, though we wish them to act as incitements to fresh exertion, by affording the certainty that, as far as Heaven grants us power of discrimination, merit of any kind shall never be left without its reward. Since we last had an opportunity

of signifying our approbation, you have continued to do well; and, in consequence thereof, as well as at the solicitation of your friend here present, it is our intention to bestow upon you the regiment which he himself raised, and in which you have hitherto exercised a subordinate command. The commission, as I said before, shall be sent to you ere your departure to-morrow."

Long replies are never suitable to any expression of the royal will, and even thanks had better be brief as well as forcible. I had, therefore, no inducement, even if I had been disposed at the time, to be eloquent; and, setting forth my gratitude, as shortly, but as pointedly as I could, I took my leave and drew back. Monsieur de Villardin also received permission immediately to retire, and, re-entering his carriage, we drove homewards.

If the new mark of royal favour I had received had, in the slightest degree, rekindled the spark of hope in my bosom — and I suppose that such is always, more or less, the tendency of some unexpected success, — Monsieur

de Villardin, as we returned to his hotel, unconsciously extinguished the light altogether.

After congratulating me upon my good fortune, which he represented, and represented truly, as opening the way to the highest honours in the French army, he added, “ You will be delighted, my dear boy, I am sure—as I know you take as much interest in my affairs as if you were my own son,—you will be delighted, I say, to hear that I have found for my dear Laura the very best alliance, perhaps in all France. Yesterday, at the palace, I met with my good friend, the Count de Laval, whose fortune and family, and high character, place him amongst the first, in the first rank of our French nobility. He at once asked my daughter’s hand, and enhanced the compliment by telling me that he had determined upon that step two years before, and had only waited that I might become thoroughly acquainted both with his situation and disposition, before he ventured to propose the alliance. I need not tell you, that I instantly accepted his proposal. But, as we both agreed that Laura is

still too young, the final arrangements must be delayed for a year and a half."

Luckily it happened that the carriage was, at that moment, passing through one of those dark, narrow streets, which leave many parts of Paris in a continual state of obscurity. Had it not been so, I am convinced that the agony which his words inflicted could not have escaped the eyes of Monsieur de Villardin. It is impossible to describe all I felt at what appeared to me to be a cold and heartless sacrifice of the girl I loved to a man whom she had never yet beheld.

But little, either, could I reconcile such conduct with the deep and impassioned feelings which Monsieur de Villardin naturally possessed; though such unfortunately was, and is the universal method of arranging all transactions of the kind in France; and Laura's father, perhaps, never considered it possible that any other plan could be pursued to render his child more happy. Little did he know, indeed, what was passing in my heart as he spoke, or a new view of her situation must instantly have burst upon his

sight, however impossible he might have felt it to break the engagements he had already formed. Nor did I attempt to alter his determination, well knowing that no change therein could work a benefit to myself. I replied nothing to his communication, except some incoherent words expressive of surprise ; and after they had passed my lips, I remained in dark and bitter silence, revolving acts of madness and folly, which I hardly dare to think of even at this moment.

My feelings before had been all light and sunshiny — happiness itself compared to those which I now experienced. I cannot, indeed, say that I had forgot that Laura could become the bride of another ; but, even while I knew and felt that she could never be mine, the image of her I loved as another man's wife had never presented itself to my mind. Now that it did rise up before me, it was too painful to be endured, and, from the sensations that I experienced during that day and the two that followed it, I gained my first full insight into all those passions which had torn and distracted Monsieur de Villardin him-

self during the week that had preceded the death of his unhappy wife.

To bring about my own death, or that of the Count de Laval were, during that time, the only thoughts continually present to my mind, and the idea of the latter was certainly predominant for some time. As hours passed away, however, I began to remember that, even were my own hand to rid me of the rival that had thus sprung up, I should be still as far from hope as ever; and that, under whatever pretence I might seek a quarrel with him, and call him to the field, the act itself would be nothing short of murder in my own eyes, and the eyes of the Almighty, however the blind world might regard the deed.

Such feelings occupied me during the whole of that evening and night with such intensity, that I certainly forgot all form and ceremony. I remained silent, gloomy, abstracted; and both my little page and Monsieur de Villardin concluded that I was seriously ill. The next morning early I found a surgeon in my room, who, informing me that he had been sent

for to attend me, felt my pulse and proposed to bleed me. Although I knew that the malady which affected me had nothing to do with my corporeal frame, and that, unless he could give medicine to my mind, the most skillful son of Esculapius could effect no ultimate cure upon me, yet I suffered him to do his will, and, perhaps, did feel relieved in some degree from the sort of burning headach which I experienced, as the blood flowed from the vein, and my frame began to grow weaker from the loss of that fluid which had been flowing like liquid fire through every limb.

As we were to set out for the army, however, at mid-day, I went in search of Monsieur de Villardin as soon as the operation was over; and, notwithstanding all his remonstrances, insisted upon accompanying him, declaring that I felt better for the bleeding, and should soon be quite well. Not long after, my commission arrived; and, having by this time given up all thought of making the Count de Laval the victim of my disappointment, I set out for the camp with the stern and gloomy determination

of never returning from the field alive. I will do my duty, I thought, in every respect; and, by exposing myself on all occasions wherever danger is to be found, I shall surely, at length, be enabled to gain that fate, which will set these warring passions at rest for ever.

According to the rule which I have laid down for myself, I shall speak of the events of my military career as briefly as possible. Our regiment had been quartered in the neighbourhood of Senlis; and, as the inferior officers were generally steady and experienced, we found it already in marching order when we arrived. By this time Turenne had determined to open the campaign by an attack upon some of the enemy's towns in Flanders, and—being joined at Condé by Monsieur de Villardin, with our own regiment and two or three others, which were now united under his command,—that great general first marched upon Tournay. Finding, however, that he had been deceived in regard to the state of preparation of that town, he instantly fell back upon Condé, and thence marched direct for Valen-

ciennes, which was invested the night of his arrival.

Two redoubts were the only defences which obstructed our first approaches; and, having volunteered to attack them, I here made my first essay in that headlong, and incautious plan of action, upon which I had determined as the means of winning both glory and the grave. However much the first object might be gained, I soon found that fate seemed capriciously resolved to disappoint me of the second. In forcing my way into the redoubts, through one of the most tremendous cross fires that ever I beheld, twenty or thirty of my men fell around me in every direction, — scarcely one of the whole storming party escaped without some injury; but, at the end of five minutes, I, who had been madly rash in every part of the action, found myself standing unhurt in the midst of the conquered redoubts, with nothing but death and destruction around me on every side. When the whole was settled, I returned towards the camp, and was immediately admitted to the presence of Monsieur de Turenne,

who had watched the attack till the affair was decided, and who now, in the presence of his staff, gave me high praises for my conduct throughout the evening. The moment after, however, he added, " I wish to show you something, my young friend, which perhaps you can execute to-morrow morning. — I will be back directly, gentlemen," he added, turning to the other officers, several of whom had risen to accompany him, but now paused at this intimation of his desire to go alone, and then taking his hat and cane, he led me to a little mound, at a short distance from his tent, where being quite without witnesses, his whole aspect immediately changed, and he addressed me with a severe and frowning brow, " You have been rash, Sir," he said, " extremely rash ; and what is more, I perceive you know it. Remember, Sir, that courage and temerity are as different as wit and impertinence, and that however much you may choose to expose your own person, you have no right to expose the troops of his Majesty."

Thus saying he turned upon his heel, and was leaving me ; but the expression of bitter

mortification which his words had produced upon my countenance touched him, and he came back. "Monsieur de Juvigny," he said, "I am angry with you, because I know you can do better than you have done this day. I do not absolutely disapprove of a young man risking somewhat more than necessary in his own person, but I do strongly disapprove of his acting rashly when in a command, such as that entrusted to you this evening. You may receive it as a mark of personal regard that I did not choose to blame you publicly; but at the same time do not let that circumstance deprive this admonition of any of its force, and take care to be more prudent for the future."

Although the reproof I had received was certainly well merited, and sunk deep into my memory, I nevertheless resolved to expose my own person as much as ever, though at the same time I saw the necessity of being more careful of my troops. For many days, time seemed to have no effect upon the bitter and painful feelings which had taken possession of my heart, and despair was my constant com-

panion. Gloomy, melancholy, and reserved, I avoided the society of my fellow officers; and at night when I was in my tent, I gave myself up to sombre meditations, which consumed in vain regrets the greater part of those hours that should have been devoted to sleep. Not that I did not court slumber with all my heart, for while I was asleep was the only time that I could feel happy, though it was but the happiness of inanition. In order, however, to gain such repose, I was obliged to labour throughout the whole day, and completely to exhaust the body before I could calm the mind.

From morning till night I was either on horseback, or working as a volunteer in the trenches, or accompanied by little Clement de la Marke, visiting the different posts, and endeavouring to give him a thorough and practical knowledge of the duties of a soldier. Wherever the thickest of the enemies' fire was directed, there I was still to be found, yet as I showed myself careful of my troops, my conduct now drew down upon me great praise, although the motive, I am afraid, was the same as before.

My little page was indeed a great comfort to me, for quick, lively, enquiring, while he was with me, he gave constant occupation to my mind, and from his prompt powers of apprehension pleased and delighted, while he furnished me with matter for indifferent thought, and filled the painful moments of leisure. For the first ten days, indeed, of the siege of Valenciennes, we were in no want of employment, for the garrison took every means which skill and resolution could suggest or execute to delay our progress or to compel us to abandon the attempt. As the force within the walls was but small, an effort was immediately made to throw a reinforcement into the place, and this proving vain, means were taken to inundate a great part of the ground within our lines. To remedy this the cavalry was constantly employed for several days in carrying fascines, for the purpose of forming both a floating bridge and a dike across the inundation, which was not effected without infinite difficulty and loss of time. A worse result also ensued, in consequence of the extensive inundation which

the enemy had been able to effect; a violent fever broke out in the camp, and one of the first persons attacked was my poor little page. I loved the boy most sincerely, and I had taken a sort of sad pleasure in winning his affection by every means, and in fancying that *he* at least would regret me bitterly when I was gone. I now, however, soon saw him reduced to the brink of the grave, and every moment that I could spare, I passed by his bedside. The poor little fellow, restless and delirious, still retained all his gentleness and affection. He would receive his remedies from no hand but mine, and often in the night when he saw me watching by him, he would beg me—in sentences confused and incoherent enough, indeed—to lie down and take my rest without minding him.

The time I spent with him was not lost to my mind; for, whether there was something monitory in the sight of a fellow being, fluttering for days upon the very verge of eternity, or whether my better feelings were themselves struggling up by their own strength,

I cannot tell; but I began to reflect upon my late conduct, and to view it in a different light from that which I had done at first. Reason soon showed me that the rash purpose of courting danger, which I had entertained, was, in fact, but a specious kind of suicide, a crime for which I had both a great contempt, and a great detestation; and after many a painful night of thought, I arrived at the conclusion which I should have reached at first, if passion had not overpowered my understanding. I found that I was bound by every tie to conquer the love which had so mastered my judgment to banish for ever the dream that had bewildered me; and, if I could not succeed in crushing my own feeling, at least to conceal them most scrupulously. I went farther: I determined to act towards Laura and her father as if such sensations did not exist, — neither to avoid their society, nor to let them discover, by any means, that a change had come over my heart. I knew and felt that the attempt would be most agonising, but I fancied that the human mind could perform any task which it undertook, and thus, even with better

purposes, I was again led into error. I scarcely know whether I was not deceiving myself, and whether from the first there was not mingling with all my reasoning the latent desire of seeing, once more at least, the being that I most loved on earth. — I scarcely know, even now, whether it was so, or whether my designs were purely good and firm; for, of all the things that God has created, there is none so subtle as the human heart. At all events, this book is one of confessions as well as of memoirs, and the facts shall be told as they arose. Let others judge the motives, for no man yet, in every point, has judged himself justly.

At the end of nine or ten days, my young companion showed signs of amendment, and the surgeon strongly admonished me to turn my cares to my own health. It became necessary, indeed, that I should be more frequently absent from Clement's bedside, for duties of a different kind now called for constant exertions. By this time the Spanish army, commanded by the Prince de Condé, had approached within sight of our lines of circumvallation, and it was evi-

dent to all who knew that great general, that an attack upon our camp would soon follow. At what point the assault would be made, of course, no one could tell; and, with the small force at our command, it was impossible to guard every part of the great extent of lines. Our infantry did not amount in all to above twelve thousand men, and what with those employed in carrying on the two separate attacks, which were going on against the town, and with those employed on other duty, a great part of our entrenchments were left exposed. Under these circumstances, and expecting every hour to see Condé attempt to force our camp, Turenne employed the cavalry to watch the lines continually, while three regiments of infantry were constantly held in readiness to march to whatever point should be ultimately assailed. All these precautions, however, were unavailing. The Maréchal de la Ferté, haughty, presumptuous, and jealous, neglected the warnings and counsels of Turenne; and Condé, well knowing which of the generals he was most likely to find unprepared, determined to attack

the quarters of the former. My regiment had been on duty during the whole day, and after informing Monsieur de Turenne, that I had seen demonstrations on the part of the enemy of a determination to pass the Scheldt, and attack the Maréchal de la Ferté, I retired to my tent for the night. It was the first evening that Clement had risen from his bed, and after supper I went into his part of the tent, and sat with him for about half an hour, listening to all the gay visions which the prospect of returning health called up in his mind, when suddenly I heard a sharp discharge of musketry from the side of Azin. Well understanding what it meant, I rushed out, got my men under arms, and, springing on horse back, rode towards the tent of Monsieur de Turenne, while the flashes and the report both showed that the enemy were already in the quarters of Monsieur de la Ferté. I found Monsieur de Villardin with the general, and both as calm as if they had been going to their beds.

Turenne was in the act of ordering two regiments of infantry to cross the dike and the

bridge of fascines, and support the Maréchal de la Ferté, ere he (Turenne) could himself arrive with a stronger reinforcement.

“Monsieur de Villardin,” he added, “I beg that you will remain here, and attend to the safety of the lines between the river Rouelle and the Chemin de Mons. Monsieur de Juvigny, his highness the Prince de Condé is not a man to make this attack without securing some diversion in his favour. Lead your regiment down to support the troops of Lorraine and the household forces, and bid them be upon the alert, for it would not surprise me if Don Juan or the Count de Marsin beat up their quarters.”

I lost no time in obeying the orders, while the continued fire from Mont Azin showed me that the business was not yet concluded in that direction. Ere I had reached the quarters of Lorraine, however, a few straggling shots from the lines in the neighbourhood of the little river Rouelle showed me that Turenne had not been mistaken, when he anticipated an attack on his side of the town likewise. I was at that moment within five hundred yards of that part

of the lines ; and, as there was a good open space before me for the manœuvres of cavalry, I halted the regiment, and rode on to ascertain how matters went. The next instant I met a company of infantry hurrying up ; but, before they could reach the palisade, it had been forced by the troops of the enemy at several points ; and, though the night was very dark, I could plainly perceive a strong body of Spanish infantry pushing forward by the side of the river. As the force already on the ground could offer no sufficient opposition to their progress, I felt it my duty to bring up the regiment, and make head against the enemy where first I met them. Our own company of foot gave them one discharge, just as I was approaching at the full trot ; and, taking advantage of some small confusion which this produced, I charged, and with very little difficulty drove them once more beyond the lines.

The adversary's force was at this point but small ; and probably their object was more to occupy the troops of Turenne, and effect a diversion in favour of the attack of Condé, than

really to attempt the relief of the town. By the time, however, that we had contrived to drive them back beyond the palisade, a regiment of infantry arrived to our support ; and, judging that the camp was now safe in that quarter, I proceeded to obey my first orders, and marched forward to join the household troops. As I rode on, I remarked that the firing had almost ceased in the quarters of Monsieur de la Ferté, and I was led to hope that the adversary had also been repulsed there. A moment after, however, the sound of loud acclamations from the town, and a tremendous fire opened upon our trenches — which had been pushed to the edge of the fosse — showed me at once that the city had been relieved. Before I had proceeded a hundred yards farther, I met Monsieur de Turenne galloping back at the head of his guards ; and he demanded, somewhat hastily, what had delayed me so long. I had never been famous for using many words, and I now replied, in as few as possible, that I had found the lines by the side of the lesser stream attacked and carried

by the enemy, and that I had but paused to charge, and drive them out.

“You did right,” replied the Marshal, with a smile; “Monsieur de la Ferté has been unfortunate — the town is relieved — we must retreat; but there is no danger,” he added, in a louder tone, “if the men will but show the calm courage of true Frenchmen.”

I must confess that a good deal of confusion now succeeded. Turenne endeavoured instantly to withdraw his troops from the trenches; but, notwithstanding all his skill and all his coolness, an immense number were lost. Condé and the forces from the town pressed upon us hard; but, nevertheless, we had sufficient time to evacuate the lines, and secure the principal part of our baggage and artillery, without any great annoyance from the enemy. My first care was to get poor little Clement upon a waggon, and to see him safely out of the camp, in which the panic and haste of a night engagement was spreading much more confusion than necessary. As soon as the baggage and artillery were secure, Turenne made no further

attempt to maintain his position, but, merely presenting a bold front to the enemy whenever he saw the likelihood of a renewed attack, he caused regiment after regiment to evacuate the lines, remaining himself till the last man had quitted them.

When we were once out of the camp, and in free and open ground, order and tranquillity were soon restored; and so skilfully did Turenne conduct his march, that the enemy, though now infinitely superior to ourselves in number, did not dare to attack us.

The rest of the incidents of that campaign were certainly interesting enough to military men; but, as it is my own history, and not the history of Europe, that I am writing, I must turn once more to the subject of self. — There now existed a continual struggle in my mind, in order to familiarise my thoughts with the idea of Laura de Villardin becoming the wife of another. I tried to impress upon my heart, as it was already impressed upon my understanding, that she never could be mine, and that her hand must be bestowed upon the

Count de Laval ; and I fancied that, by continually keeping this image before my eyes, while I daily exercised my resolution by the contemplation, I should be able to tranquillise the pain I suffered, and even to quell my love by the certainty of its hopelessness. In some degree, I certainly succeeded,—if, indeed, I may so call it ; for the object that I attained, was very different from that which I strove for. I did not remove one pang from my heart, but I learned to bear them ; I did not in the least diminish my love, or for a moment forget her that inspired it, but I learned the means of concealing it within my own bosom, and hiding its existence, in some sort, even from myself. What was, perhaps, worse than all, at least in its effect ; I lulled myself in an imaginary security ; fancied that I could command both my feelings and my actions ; and determined that, however much I might suffer internally, I would behave in every respect as if no feelings but those of fraternal regard actuated me towards Laura de Villardin. The delusion was one which nothing but love

could enable a man to practise on himself; especially after having marked, with keen and interested eyes, in my early youth, the very same conduct pursued by Lord Masterton, and having seen how entirely it had failed. Nevertheless, the deception with myself was quite complete; and though, perhaps, I had that degree of apprehension in regard to my own resolutions, which would have made me very willingly remain with the army, even in winter quarters, had such a thing been required, yet I had so taught myself to believe that it was absolutely necessary for me to act entirely as an indifferent person, that I took not the slightest step to obtain any of those small appointments, which would have been granted me at once, and which would have afforded a fair excuse for absenting myself from a place so dangerous to my peace.

It must not, however, be thought that, on all days and at all times, during the six months we spent with the army, my feelings or resolutions remained in the same state. Quite on the contrary; though I have detailed what was

the general result, yet my mood and my thoughts were in a continual state of fluctuation; and a thousand trifles would occur, from day to day, to give a new course to my sentiments, in which they would remain for a few hours, and then, after calm reflection, would be overruled by my former determinations. Thus, many a time, a casual word from Monsieur de Villardin, or from little Clement de la Marke, concerning her I loved, her conduct during the past, or her prospects for the future, would throw me back into one of my fits of wild despair; and, forgetting every better thought, I would rush into the very teeth of danger, and court death, like a madman, wherever he was to be found. Then, again, I would fall into deep and gloomy musings, which would occupy me for whole days; and then I would almost be tempted to commit a greater act of madness than all, and, acknowledging my love and my despair, pour out my blood at her feet.

All these paroxysms, however, lasted but their time; and still reflection restored to me

my former determinations, which gradually became more and more fixed, as, passing through the rest of the campaign, I followed Turenne in all his brilliant movements and successful enterprises, till at length, in the end of November, the army re-entered France, was dispersed in winter quarters in Picardy, and I returned with Monsieur de Villardin to Paris.

CHAPTER IV.

IT happened, perhaps fortunately, that Monsieur de Villardin's new station in the army had prevented my being with him so continually as during our former campaigns. Thus the great change that had taken place in my habits and my feelings had not been so constantly brought before him as it otherwise would have been. It had not, however, passed without remark; and the consequences were totally different from those which would most probably have followed, had he known the causes of the melancholy that oppressed me. The desire of keeping me near him, which he had expressed on my last return to Brittany, was now increased to a positive determination of not suffering me to be absent from him; and, when I faintly proposed to remain behind him in Paris, and to see somewhat of the court, in which were

now just bursting forth the dawnings of that full blaze of magnificence which it ultimately displayed, he laid his hand affectionately upon my arm, replying, — “ No, no, my dear Juvigny ; you must come with me into the calm quiet of the country. You have over-exerted both your mind and your body ; and I see that you are always better and happier when you are with me in Brittany.”

I had not strength of mind to say no ; and, besides, I had persuaded myself that neither danger nor harm could accrue from my following the course he pointed out. We returned, therefore, to Brittany, after a very short stay in Paris. The journey seemed an eternity ; and, when once I was embarked in it, more than one misgiving as to my own resolution and firmness certainly did cross my heart. It was now, however, too late to retreat ; and at length the carriage stopped before the grey towers of the Près Vallée. Our coming had been notified beforehand ; and Laura instantly ran out to welcome her father. It seemed to me that every hour since I had left her had added some

new charm to features that before had seemed perfection ; had given some additional grace to a form which had before appeared in my eyes symmetry itself. From her father she turned to me ; but I felt her hand tremble in mine, and her cheek burned as my lips touched it. Her eyes, too, sought the ground of the terrace ; and her words of welcome were warm, indeed, but faltering and low. Every thing told me that the discovery which had taken place in my own heart had been made also by hers, and that, whether she could return my affection or not, she was no longer unconscious of my love. It is scarcely possible to explain what were my feelings at that moment. I was agitated — I was even pained ; and yet the joy of seeing her again, and, perhaps, a fancy, too, that my affection was not without return, were sufficient to outweigh, for the moment, all the apprehensions, and sorrows, and anxieties which were cast into the other scale. Her first embarrassment wore away in an instant ; and it was easy to see that, whatever she had discovered, none of the pains and sorrows which

had become so familiar to my mind, had, as yet, presented themselves to her eyes.

While little Clement de la Marke was claiming his share of welcome, Monsieur de Villardin and I turned to meet Father Ferdinand, who was now coming out to receive us. I had not seen him for nearly three years; and that space of time seemed to have effected a greater change in him than in any of the rest of the party, with the exception, indeed, of Laura, who, from a sweet graceful girl, had grown into a beautiful woman. He was now, certainly, an old man; and a considerable inclination of his head, marked, but not undignified, had taken near two inches from his height since last I saw him. He embraced me as a father would do a son, and asked me anxiously what was the cause of the sad change he remarked in my once robust and muscular frame? As he spoke, I saw Laura's eyes seek mine with an expression of anxiety and apprehension which was painfully sweet to my heart. She spoke not, however; and I replied to Father Ferdinand, attempting to smile gaily as I did so.

“ You must remember, my good Father,” I answered, “ I am no longer a boy, and may well be expected to lose the plump, smooth-faced roundness of my youth: besides, I have seen some hard service; and more than eighteen years which I have now spent—ever more or less in the tented field—may well be supposed to take away a great deal from one’s youthful freshness.”

Laura sighed deeply and Father Ferdinand gravely shook his head; and I could see distinctly that neither the one nor the other gave credit to the reasons I assigned for my altered appearance. No more questions, however, were asked; and all the bustle and the little tittle-tattle of a first arrival in the country carried us well and lightly over the evening. I dreaded, it is true, the coming of the next morning; for now that I was in the midst of the peril, I had become apprehensive of myself; I felt that each night I should have to thank God if I had done nothing wrong; I felt that every day would bring a renewed struggle against myself; I felt that I should

look to every sunrise with dread, lest I should fail in resolution during the coming day. Even the sweetest and dearest feelings of my heart were causes of apprehension. Every look, every word, of Laura de Villardin was to me a subject of delight, so bright, so deep, that, conscious of all which was going on within my bosom, I feared the joy I felt in her society would each instant betray itself to others. But that fear was not all that embittered the enjoyment. I felt now but too keenly that I was nurturing a passion which must end in misery ; and that the sweet, sweet draught, which I was draining to the dregs, was mingled with poison which must speedily take effect. Yet now that I grasped the cup, with the full knowledge of all that it contained, I would not have resigned it for a world till the last drop had been drained. I listened to the tones of her voice, I hung upon her every smile ; and when, during the evening, with her fair arms thrown round little Clement de la Marke, she listened while the boy repeated enthusiastically how very very kind I had been to him during his illness,

I gazed upon her beaming countenance till she turned her eyes towards me with a look of sweet applause; and the feelings of my heart becoming too over-powering to be mastered, I quitted the room hastily, lest the mingled emotions should make a woman of me, and overflow at my eyes.

How the night passed, it were useless to relate. Agitation such as I felt, sleeps but little; and with the grey dawn, I plunged into the woods and wandered on wildly, seeking to gain command over myself ere I encountered any of the family. For nearly two hours I pursued a varying and irregular path, avoiding the hamlets and scattered cottages that here and there sheltered themselves in the edges of the wood surrounding the Près Vallée, and walking on, now quick, now slow, amongst the gloom of the old trees, and by the dim banks of the silent stream. Bitter, bitter was my commune with my own heart, and little way did I make in the attempt to vanquish emotions that seemed to become more turbulent under reflection. Following solely as my guide the

desire of avoiding a meeting with any human being, I scarcely knew which way I turned, till at length I found myself within a few yards of the grave of the unhappy Count de Mesnil. Some impulse, I do not well know what,—whether there was a latent sympathy in my bosom with the love, however mad and vicious, which had been expiated by his death, or whether there was alone that thirst of calm repose which was to be found nowhere but in the grave, I cannot tell,—but some impulse caused me to cast myself down upon the turf that covered his remains, and, giving way to all the bitterest feelings of my heart, I wept aloud, fervently wishing that I might soon find a quiet resting-place like that.

Ere I had been there a moment, I heard a flutter of female garments bending over me; and raising my eyes, I beheld Laura de Villardin with her eyes full of tears at the suffering which she saw me endure without being able to account for. I started up, and, in the agitation of the moment, gazed upon her without salutation, while she exclaimed,—“ Oh tell me—do

tell me, dear De Juvigny, what is it makes you so unhappy?"

My firmness was gone before — my good resolution vanished, and pressing the hand that she held out to me to my lips and to my heart, I told her all — how deeply, how passionately I loved her. With the warm blood crimson over her cheek and forehead, she sank down in my arms and hid her face upon my bosom, while a tear or two sprang up in her eyes, and shone like living diamonds amongst her long dark eye-lashes. It was but for a moment that, yielding to woman's first impulse, she hid her face; but then, raising her look to mine, as, sitting on the very grave of De Mesnil, I held her circled in my arms, she asked, — "And is that all? Do I not love you too?"

The hardest and bitterest part of the task was still to come. I had to tell her how hopeless was our love, which her ignorance of the world had not suffered her to perceive; and although I thought I had no right to inform her that her father destined her for another, which I found he himself had not yet com-

municated, yet I had to explain to her that our union was quite impossible.

“ But are we not very happy as we are ? ” she asked. “ Why make yourself wretched by thinking of what you acknowledge cannot be ? Why not let us live on as we now are, loving each other more dearly than any thing else in life—seeing each other every day—spending our whole days together ? Why not let us live thus, and be as happy as we have hitherto been ? ”

I had to crush the bright bubble for ever. “ But,” I said, “ when you are required to marry some other, Laura, what will then become of me ? ”

“ Oh, but I will never marry any one else ! ” she replied, eagerly : “ no, no, I love you ; and if I cannot marry you, of course no one else shall ever have my hand ! ”

“ But listen to me, dear Laura,” I replied. “ Suppose your father makes it a command, can you disobey ? Suppose he comes to you and tells you that he has plighted his word and engaged his honour that you shall be the bride

of some man equal in fortune and station to yourself—will you refuse to redeem his pledge? will you offend him for ever, and bring upon him the imputation of breaking his word? Can you do it, Laura?”

She wept bitterly, and I felt that those tears were a sufficient reply; I was gaining more firmness myself, also, from the very arguments I used; and I went on.—“No, no, dear Laura, we must both try to do our duty: I love you beyond every thing on earth; and it would nearly destroy me to see you the wife of another: but yet let us make up our minds to that which cannot be avoided. We can never forget, we can never wholly cease to love each other; but we must make an effort to conquer our love, at least so far as to render it no longer dangerous or wrong; we must try to rule it by reason and by resolution, and to reduce it, if possible, to that affection which brother and sister may feel towards each other.”

“Then you must help me—then you must guide me, De Juvigny,” she replied; “you must teach me that which is right to do; for I feel,

indeed I feel that I am incapable of guiding myself."

"It is a terrible task, Laura—it is a terrible task," I replied—"for a heart that loves like mine, to teach you how our love is to be conquered; and yet the very responsibility will, I trust, enable me to execute it well: but, hark! I hear a step," and I started up.

"It is only Lise," she replied: "I sent her back for a book; but she knows all about it. She first told me I loved you months ago."

I wished no *confidantes* to a passion so hopeless as ours; but ere I could think, Lise was too near us to avoid her, and Laura's eyes told too distinctly a part of our story, to leave her ignorant of the remainder. She was a good and affectionate, but somewhat romantic creature; and though the *suivante* would have been the last to counsel her mistress to any thing that she believed to be wrong, yet she had too much knowledge of the human heart to believe that a deep-rooted passion could ever be eradicated by the means that we proposed to employ; and her notions of what would be

proper under such cases were likewise very different from ours. As soon as, by one means or another, she had made herself mistress of all that had passed, and had heard our difficulties and our resolutions, she shook her head, exclaiming, — “ That will never do ! No, no, Monsieur de Juvigny, there is only one way for it. Such love as yours and Mademoiselle’s is not to be conquered as you think, and it must have its way, or worse will come of it. I have been thinking ever since you were here last, of what would be best to do, for I very well saw the whole business then, and quite understood that Monsieur le Duc would never consent. However, I have a scheme for you ; you must marry privately : I know a good priest at Rennes who will undertake to perform the ceremony ; and then, when it is found out, which it certainly will be in time, Monsieur de Villardin will be very angry at first, of course ; but then he will soon forgive you, and it will be all settled.”

Laura was silent ; and as her hand rested on my arm, I could feel it tremble violently. For

my part, I own that—though poor Lise meant no harm—yet, had she been the very fiend himself, she could not have tempted me more dreadfully. Honour however overcame; and after a long, painful pause, I answered,—“ No, no, Lise! Monsieur de Villardin is my friend, my benefactor, my more than father, and I cannot betray his trust.”

“ But is not Mademoiselle, here, your friend, your love, and your more than sister?” answered Lise, laughing; “ and will you make her unhappy for ever? But never mind; I knew that you would talk a great deal of that kind of nonsense whenever I came to propose it; but you ’ll see you will both be of my opinion before a fortnight be over, and then it will be,—‘ Pray, good Lise, seek the priest;’ and as I am the best creature in the world, I *will* seek the priest. So when you have made up your minds to do the only thing that can save you both from a great deal of unhappiness, let me know, and I will arrange all the rest.”

Thus saying, she turned away and walked a short distance towards the château, in order to

leave Laura and myself time to speak together alone. As soon as she was gone, the dear girl raised her eyes to mine, and said, —“ We must not do it, De Juvigny—we must not do it! It would be very happy, doubtless, to know that nothing could ever separate us, but it would be at the expense of your honour and my duty, and we must not do it. But, hark! there is the breakfast hour striking; we must go back separate; but you must, indeed you must tell me how I am to act, and what I am to do, to conquer all these feelings, and guard myself against wrong. We will walk out together to-morrow morning, as we used to do, and you shall give me my lesson.”

But consciousness had, as usual, taken from me my bold firmness. I was not certain that any step that I was taking was right, and therefore I dreaded that any one should discover all that was passing between myself and Laura. “ It will be better, dear Laura,” I replied, “ for us to meet in some part of the woods—at all events till we have fully determined the line of conduct we are to pursue.

Let us have time to think and judge for ourselves before any one else perceives our feelings towards each other, and assumes the right of judging for us. Where shall I meet you to-morrow?"

"Since you have been away," she answered, "I have been much in the habit of coming out in the summer mornings to read under this tree. It is one of the finest round about, and if you remark, there is a little kind of rise in the soft turf at its foot, which serves me for a seat."

It was the grave of Monsieur de Mesnil to which she pointed; and certainly the memories connected with that spot did not render the feelings of my heart less sad. I replied, however, — "Well, let us meet here: we are less likely to be disturbed here, perhaps, than elsewhere."

"That was one of the reasons why I used to love the place," replied Laura: "I never found any one here yet but Father Ferdinand, whom I one day saw kneeling at his beads beneath this tree; but it is almost always lonely, and I used to come here with a book, and sometimes

read a little : but more often think of you and my Father, and pray God to shield you both from all the dangers of the war. Let us part, however, now ; for it is growing late, and I must wash my eyes before any one sees me."

I pressed her to my heart, and I pressed my lips to hers — I acted very wrong in so doing, I know ; but, as I have said, this book is a confession, and therefore I tell all — I pressed her to my heart, and I pressed my lips to hers, and then we parted ; to meet again the next morning at the same spot.

My next private interview was one with Father Ferdinand. I saw, during breakfast, that he was anxious to speak with me ; but the feeling of consciousness to which I have before referred, made me as desirous of avoiding any particular conversation with him now as I had formerly been willing and pleased to enjoy his society alone. As soon as the meal was over, then, I turned, as if to seek my own apartments, but in reality intending to take my hat and once more go out into the park. So well acquainted, however, was Father Ferdinand with the turns of the

human heart, and the actions that all those various turns are likely to produce, that he met me at the gate at the very moment I was setting out; and, laying his hand upon my arm, he said, — “I am about to take my walk with you, my son.”

I had now no excuse for avoiding his society, and we walked on together, proceeding for the first few minutes in silence. He then began the conversation by telling me that he felt deeply and personally all the care and kindness that I had bestowed upon Clement de la Marke. “I have spoken with the little fellow long this morning,” he said, “and from all that he has told me, I must say that, had you been his own father, or his brother, you could not have shown him more judicious kindness.”

I knew the good priest too well, and the exact proportion of kindly subtlety which tempered a disposition that was naturally candid, to believe that his sole object in thus forcing me, as it were, into a private interview with him, was to commend my behaviour to the little page. Nevertheless, though I understood all

this very well, yet he went on so long and so skilfully, speaking upon that subject, and the events of the campaign alone, that I was thrown off my guard, and found myself detailing many of the occurrences that had taken place, more at large than I had intended, or, perhaps, desired. Observing me pause, as I found this to be the case, he replied, quietly,—"It seems to me, my son, that in this last campaign you have exposed yourself a great deal more than was at all necessary; and, indeed, Clement has told me that you did so to such a degree, that it became a common observation amongst both officers and soldiers that you were *seeking death*.—Tell me, my son," he added, in a more emphatic tone—"tell me, if you love me, what is the cause of that deep despondency, which you cannot conceal from one, who, like myself, has watched you, with the affection of a father, for many years."

I felt that to deny the despondency was vain, and I did not choose to prevaricate concerning its cause. I replied, therefore, at once,—"You must not ask me, my good father. At some

time — and that ere long — I will tell you the whole. But rest satisfied at present with knowing that though perhaps, as it seems was too apparent, I did seek death wherever he was to be found, yet I have now learned to think better; and, whatever I may suffer, will make such frantic attempts no more.”

“I trust that it will be so,” replied Father Ferdinand, — “I trust that it will be so. As you tell me not the cause of your suffering, and I will not pretend to know it, I can of course offer you no spiritual consolation: nevertheless, I can perhaps yield you some of a worldly kind. Therefore, let me beg you to remember, before you make yourself miserable about anything that this earth contains, that those things which seem the most hopeless are often, by a slight change of circumstances, brought within our reach. Let my own history be a warning to you. Born to a high rank, and to a princely fortune, from an early disappointment I abjured station, wealth, and the world, concealed myself in the cells of a foreign monastery, and when, at the end of twenty years, I came forth

again in the humble state in which you now see me, I discovered that had I but paused three months ere I rendered my fate irrevocable, every obstacle which lay in my way would have been removed, and that all I sought might have been mine. Let it be a lesson to you, young man, and learn never to despair. Now, farewell; and when you are inclined to make me your confidant, you will always find that you have a sincere friend."

Thus saying, he turned away and left me to pursue my walk alone. What he told me was, indeed, intended to produce a good effect; but, nevertheless, the consequences might have been very evil. He raised up again hopes that were better crushed. He conjured up dreams that were only calculated to mislead; and, for the first half hour, believing that he had seen the real cause of all I suffered, and thought it right, from some other knowledge that I did not possess, to encourage my hopes, I gave myself up to visions of joy. Then, however, came the remembrance that Monsieur de Villardin had promised the hand of his daughter to the Count

de Laval; and, recollecting that he had not informed Laura herself of the fact, I saw clearly that he had not informed Father Ferdinand either. The good Priest, then, I concluded, had seen our love; and, not knowing the engagement which bound the Duke to another, had believed that he might be moved by our mutual affection. Thus fled, once more, all my brilliant dreams; for I was too thoroughly acquainted with Monsieur de Villardin's stern adherence to his word, to believe that any circumstance would make him even think of withdrawing it.

That day passed without any farther incident of note. The next morning I again met Laura de Villardin; and each day, during the whole week that followed, we failed not to spend at least two or three hours together — I may call it alone; for Lise, who accompanied her, generally left us till it was time to part. It must not be thought, however, that these clandestine meetings were devoted to thoughts or feelings that all the world might not have witnessed. They were foolish, I grant, and only

served to nourish the passion that we believed we were taking means and laying schemes to overcome. The proposal that Lise had made of a private marriage was never again mentioned between us. We never encouraged each other with false hopes, but admitted to our own hearts, in the fullest degree, that no chance existed of our union. The delight of being together we certainly did possess; and it was doubtless the secret desire of retaining at least that blessing which blinded our eyes to the imprudence of our continual meetings.

Our whole conversations were devoted to forming determinations of future firmness and resolution, mingled, indeed, with many a tear and many a caress; but certainly, — however weak was our conduct, — however much we suffered ourselves to be deceived by our own wishes, — our intentions at least were good throughout the whole.

Thus passed the time, as painfully as it could well be conceived, till, one morning, as we were returning towards the château, while Laura — as we were still at some distance from

the house — was hanging upon my arm, the form of Father Ferdinand appeared at a little distance in the alley before us. He saw us beyond doubt, for he paused, turned out of the way he was pursuing, and left us to proceed to the house without speaking to us. What might be the event I knew not, but I saw him no more till supper, at which every thing passed tranquilly, and we separated for the night.

CHAPTER V.

I WAS sitting musing in my room, about an hour after supper, when the door opened, and Father Ferdinand appeared. He was evidently a good deal agitated, and seemed scarcely able to speak to me.

“My son,” he said, taking both my hands and gazing anxiously in my face, — “my son, I am afraid you have done wrong.”

I understood him at once, and replied, “No, father, I have not; unless to struggle against every feeling of my heart, which prompted me to ingratitude and deceit, — unless, I say, to struggle against such feelings be evil, — I have not done wrong.”

He raised his right hand, while he still held mine in his left, saying solemnly, — “Thank God for that. I at least have acted wrong,” he added: “I once gave you hope without clearly know-

ing whither that hope might lead you. I now know all; and, I tell you, you must despair."

"Father," I replied, "I have never entertained a hope. I knew that you were unacquainted with my situation, and the dreams you raised lasted but half an hour."

"Forgive me for having raised them at all," he said; "and now, mark me; you must speak with Monsieur de Villardin —— Nay, indeed you must: he already expects you. Give me but five minutes to speak with him more at length, and then follow me to the library."

I would fain have asked more: I would fain have discovered what, or rather how much, Monsieur de Villardin knew; but there were so many contending emotions in my bosom that I was afraid my voice would be choked ere I could put my questions, and I merely replied, "I will."

Without rejoinder, Father Ferdinand left me; and, burying my face on my arms, I remained in the same state of mind as a condemned criminal who has just heard an order given for his instant execution. I was not

one, however, to shake before any mortal man. I felt too, that with the power to have won happiness for myself by wronging him I was just about to see, I had sacrificed my own peace rather than act ungratefully towards him. This feeling nerved my heart for whatever might come, and by the time that the five minutes were over, I was slowly descending the great staircase towards the library. I knew not how Monsieur de Villardin would treat me, and I almost feared, from some casual traits which I had remarked in his character, that he might demean himself haughtily towards me. Such a method was not that calculated to govern or affect one of my disposition ; and, as I passed through the saloon, and crossed the very spot where I had seen Madame de Villardin stand with the Count de Mesnil, a number of services which at different times I had rendered to the Duke rose up before my eyes, and I advanced with a firmer step, from feeling that the balance of obligation was not altogether against myself. As I passed by the mirrors, I saw that I was deadly pale ; but I

could not help that; and, opening the door, I entered the library with more command over myself than I had thought I could assume.

Monsieur de Villardin was alone, and striding up and down the room in a state of agitation that it is impossible to describe. He was at the farther end of the chamber when I entered, but immediately turned round and paused for a moment, gazing upon me with a quivering lip. I took a step or two more forward, and then waited for him to begin; but he said nothing, and, advancing rapidly towards me, threw his arms around me as if I had been his child, exclaiming—“ Oh! De Juvigny!”

It overpowered me at once: pride—and resolution, and firmness, all gave way; and I wept like a woman, while he mingled his tears with mine.

“ This is too, too much,” said Monsieur de Villardin. “ Sit down, my dear boy, and let us speak as calmly as possible over an event that has made me more wretched than you can conceive.”

Casting myself into the seat opposite to that in which he usually sat, I leaned my head for-

ward upon the table, and suffered him to proceed, while feelings that defy all language struggled fearfully in my bosom.

“ De Juvigny,” he said, in a low, earnest voice, “ my friend, my benefactor, my more than son—twice have you saved my life, once have you saved my child, ever have you counselled me aright even as a boy—you have watched my couch of sickness, you have calmed me in the moment of passion, you have laboured to prevent me from committing crime, you have striven to sooth the voice of remorse, you have sought far and near to find consolation for my grief—and now, what is it I am called to do? I have to make you miserable. I have to inflict upon you the bitterest pangs that a heart like yours can suffer. I have to deny you the only gift, which could fittingly recompense the benefits you have conferred upon me ; and all this, because I foolishly engaged myself by a promise, ere I knew how much misery it would cause to fulfil it. Believe me, my dear boy, — believe me, upon my honour, — that were it not for that promise, I would set all the world’s

maxims of pride, and ambition, and avarice, at nought; and, knowing none so worthy or so noble as yourself, would bestow upon you my sweet child as contentedly as if you were a king: — but oh! De Juvigny, that promise — that fatal promise!”

I did not forget that he had made me, too, a promise in former years, to grant me any boon that I might ask; and the idea certainly had crossed my mind, as I had descended to the library, to demand its execution now. But he had met me so differently from the manner in which I had expected to be met, that all my feelings were changed in a moment; and, as he spoke, I could make no reply; for his generous kindness shook and agitated me far more than if he had piled upon my head the bitterest of reproaches.

“Our excellent friend, Father Ferdinand,” continued Monsieur de Villardin, “has pointed out to me the cause of all your conduct during the last campaign. Strange your behaviour certainly has appeared in my eyes; and, if I remember right, the change took place when I told you

of the promise I had given, and gave you news that must have blasted all your hopes for ever."

"My lord, I never entertained a hope," I replied. "Although, I believe, without boldness, I may say that my race is as noble as your own, yet I came before you as an exiled adventurer, without home, without country, without fortune; and most presumptuous would it have been for me to entertain a hope under such circumstances. The change in my conduct, or rather the end of my happiness for life, took place as soon as I discovered what were the feelings which I had been nourishing in my bosom. It did, perhaps, add somewhat to the load, to know that Mademoiselle de Villardin was destined to wed a man she did not love; but that knowledge destroyed no hopes, for I had entertained none."

Monsieur de Villardin gazed upon me thoughtfully for several minutes, and then said, — "De Juvigny, I am almost afraid to ask you; yet answer me sincerely, and fear not that I shall blame you, for I have been too faulty a being myself to have any title to chide with

others where passion is concerned. Tell me, is Laura acquainted with your feelings towards her?"

"She is so now, my lord," I answered; "but such was not the case till our return from the last campaign."

"You have done wrong, De Juvigny," he said, speaking mournfully, but not harshly; "you have done wrong: but still, as I have said, I have no right to blame you, for I look upon myself as the cause of all this unhappiness. I should have been upon my guard; I should have known that such an intimacy could not go on without ending as it has done; and I should have taken measures either to warn you yourself, or to make you happy. I blame you not, therefore, however great might have been the relief to know that Laura was unacquainted with feelings that cannot be gratified."

"Believe me, my lord," I answered, "I never intended that she should be made acquainted with those feelings, and that the discovery of them was entirely accidental. You will do me the justice, too, I am sure, to feel

confident that my opportunities of seeing and conversing with Mademoiselle de Villardin have never been employed to make her forget her duty towards you. On the contrary, our whole thoughts have been turned to the means of overcoming a passion that we felt to be hopeless."

"There is but one means, De Juvigny," replied Monsieur de Villardin,—“there is but one way—to part. To know that I am bound to wound my daughter's happiness, as well as that of a man I love better than if he were my own son, is bitter enough; but still it must be done. My promise is given, and it must not only be held inviolable, but I must show no hesitation in fulfilling it—no wish to evade its immediate execution. You and Laura must part, De Juvigny, and I am sure that on reflection you will find it is better for you both to do so at once. I trust—I hope—that this passion has not yet obtained so deep a root in the bosom of either, as not to yield to the power of reason and the effect of time and absence."

I shook my head, for I felt that such could

not be the case ; but at the same time I replied,—“It will be better for us to part, I do indeed believe, my lord ; for, however vain it is to hope that I shall ever forget, yet my stay here serves no good purpose, and only renders myself and her I love more miserable. I am ready to set out even this very night, if you think fit.”

“ No, no,” he said hastily ; “ not so, my dear boy : you must not quit my dwelling as one in disgrace ! That I cannot suffer !—especially when I feel that I owe you atonement for having exposed you to so much unhappiness, as well as deep gratitude and affection for all that you have done for me and mine. No,—your departure must be as that of a well-beloved son, honoured, esteemed, and regretted ; and your fortune must be rendered equal to maintain a high station in society, and to obtain for you a ready acceptance from the friends of any one on whom you may hereafter place your affection.”

The feelings in my heart were too bitter to permit of my making any reply for some

minutes, but I answered at length,—“ I will appeal to your own heart, my lord, whether those who have loved deeply and truly ever love twice. But that matters not. In the present instance, you must permit me to decline any farther gift. I am proud to believe that, on some occasions, I have rendered your lordship services of some importance; and deeply gratified to find that you value them at a higher rate even than they deserve. But if, as you are pleased to say, you owe me some gratitude, I owe you infinitely more; and though I love you too deeply and too sincerely to offer to restore those things which you formerly bestowed upon me, yet I can accept no more, especially at a moment like this.”

“ I will not press you then now,” replied Monsieur de Villardin; “ but we are not going to part for ever, De Juvigny, and when we meet again, I shall insist upon that which I wave for the present. But tell me, in the meantime, what you intend to do with yourself; for of course my interest in you remains not

only unabated, but increased, from all that has occurred."

"Oh! fear not, my lord," I replied, the bitterness of my heart mastering me in spite of all my efforts, and drawing from me but an ungrateful return for the kindness of Monsieur de Villardin; "fear not, my lord; I shall do well enough. When I first touched the shores of France, my worldly situation was much less brilliant than it is at present, though I had, indeed, a lighter heart. I have now lands and lordships, and a regiment in the service of the King of France. What need I more?"

"I will tell you, De Juvigny," replied Monsieur de Villardin, laying his hand kindly upon my arm, and speaking mildly, though somewhat reproachfully; "I will tell you what you need more than all; — a friend and companion, who will sooth your sorrows, will divert your griefs from preying on your own mind, will point out topics of consolation, will persuade you to think well of those who love you, will endeavour to make you feel less acutely what it may be impossible to forget, and, in

short, will act towards you in your sorrows the part which you acted towards me in mine. It grieves me that I cannot be the man to do so myself; but if you will follow my advice, you will seek out your friend Lord Masterton, and, from all I have ever heard of him, I think you will find one who will take a deep interest in your fate, and feel the most sincere sympathy for all that afflicts you."

"No, no, my lord," I replied, "it cannot be. Lord Masterton, happy in his wife and his family, shall not be disturbed by any sorrows of mine; and, however selfish it may appear, I must confess that the sight of his domestic tranquillity would but render more painful the consciousness that such a state can never be mine. There is nothing fit for my present frame of mind but solitude. I doubt not that thought and reflection, before I am called upon to resume my duties in the service, will enable me so far to conquer my regrets and disappointment as to permit of my mingling in society, without much pain to myself or any annoyance to others. In the meantime, however, if your

lordship will permit me, I will retire either to Juvigny or to Dumont, and spend a month or two there in perfect privacy. My little page Clement will furnish me with society and entertainment enough; and when, in the course of time," I added, struggling for as much firmness as I could command,—"and when, in the course of time, the last irremediable seal is put to the destiny of Mademoiselle de Villardin and myself, as your lordship will probably be left alone from time to time, I shall hope to enjoy your society, when it can be no longer dangerous to myself, or inconsistent with your other arrangements."

Without making any reply, Monsieur de Villardin took two or three turns up and down the library, and then, sitting down again, he said,—“It is better, De Juvigny, to tell you my determination at once. As my word must be fulfilled, and as I see no object whatever to be gained by delay, I have resolved that Laura shall give her hand to the Count de Laval as soon as it be possible to complete the necessary arrangements.”

This was certainly a new pang, but I had already borne so much that night, that the very habit of suffering enabled me still to endure. I did think that Monsieur de Villardin was wrong; I did think that it was even cruel to afford his daughter no time for thought or consideration, no time to compose her feelings, no time to prepare for the future or to forget the past. Of course, however, it was not for me even to suggest an objection, and I merely bowed my head, while Monsieur de Villardin went on. "As soon as the ceremony is over, I will write to you and let you know," he said; "and I hope that, from that moment, you will be able to come to me, and supply the place of the child from whom I am about to part. In the meantime, you must not certainly set off till I have seen you to-morrow; and, let me beg you, my dear Juvigny," he added, grasping my hand, "let me beg you to strive for as much firmness as possible. Remember that, though my honour is dearer to me than life itself, yet that I love you better than any other thing, and that

to make you happy, I would sacrifice every thing — *but my honour.*”

“ I will do my best, my lord,” I replied, “ both to be and to appear firm ; and, whatever I now suffer — whatever I may hereafter have to undergo, your kindness and generosity towards me, in these, as in all other circumstances, will be the chief consolation, and the brightest remembrance that I have left.”

Thus saying, I rose and turned towards the door ; but ere I reached it, the remembrance that Laura knew nothing of what had taken place during that evening, and would expect me at our usual place of meeting, flashed across my mind, and somewhat embarrassed me. However, I could not entertain the thought for a moment, of showing the slightest ingratitude or want of confidence to one who had just treated me with so much kindness and feeling ; and, turning at the door, I again approached Monsieur de Villardin, saying, — “ You desire me, my lord, not to set out to-morrow ere I have seen you. Will you give me your own

directions as to how I am to behave towards Mademoiselle de Villardin ? ”

“ I have the most perfect confidence in you, De Juvigny,” he replied, “ and can have no objection to your having one more interview with her, though of course that must be the last. See her — speak with her — endeavour to console her — use what arguments you may think meet. I rely entirely upon your honour to do all that you can to make her yield a willing consent to that arrangement for which her father has plighted his word. You will doubtless find ready means to see her. In these respects I ask no questions in regard to the past ; and for the future I trust entirely, as I have said, to your own honour.”

We now separated ; and, returning to my own apartments, I busied myself with thoughts too wild and confused to be remembered or transcribed. I had long seen and had long known, indeed, that such must be the result of my love for Laura de Villardin. I had long seen that fate could have nothing else in store for me ; but yet I do not think that, even if I had

been taken totally unprepared, I could have felt more bitterly — more terribly — the agony of sudden disappointment, than I now felt the severing of the last tie between love and hope. If there was anything in the whole which might have proved soothing, — if there was any thing on which my mind might have rested with pleasure, it was on the noble confidence which Monsieur de Villardin had shown towards me ; but even that was not without a pang, and the sting which it inflicted was bitterer than all : for I saw from his conduct now, that had I, when first I discovered the passion that I entertained for his daughter, made him acquainted with it at once — had I, when we were journeying on together towards Paris, poured out my whole feelings into his bosom, and confided in him, as perhaps I ought to have done, Laura might still have been mine, and a brighter destiny than ever hope had pictured would have crowned the end of my career. Thus then the bitterest regret was added to the most acute disappointment.

The cup of happiness had been nearly at my lips; but, not knowing what it contained, I had passed it by, and I felt too surely that it would never come within my reach again.

I knew that such regrets were useless; I knew that nothing remained for me but to endure; I strove even to acquire strength from despair; but it was all in vain. Regret, disappointment, agony, mingled with every thought, and every memory, and every expectation; and, for an hour, I strode up and down in a state of mind that I shall not attempt any farther to depict. At the end of that time there was a light tap at my door, and the next moment Laura's maid, Lise, entered the room. My agitation was sufficiently apparent, and would probably have betrayed what had occurred, even had not the soubrette been partially aware before that some sort of a discovery had taken place.

"Ah! Monsieur le Baron," she said, as soon as she saw me, "I see how it is all going. I have been watching all the evening, and have learned enough from the going to and fro, to perceive that monseigneur has discovered it all,

and that, unless you will follow my advice, you and mademoiselle will be unhappy for ever."

"And, pray, what is your advice, my good Lise?" I demanded; "the Duke has indeed discovered all, but that makes very little difference in regard to our situation. But say, what is your advice?"

"Why, it is simply this," replied the waiting woman; "that you come directly to mademoiselle's chamber, and persuade her to set off with you to Rennes. My good friend, Father Martin, will perform the ceremony, as he promised me he would, not a week ago. Degville, the notary, will draw up the contract, and for a couple of thousand francs to a priest and a lawyer, you will get the sweetest lady in all Brittany, and the one that loves you best."

It is not impossible that, had Monsieur de Villardin said one harsh or unkind word to me, had he treated me with pride or with indignity, he might have lost his daughter; and I, teaching myself to believe that every stratagem is honourable in love, might have embraced the plan which Lise, in her love for the romantic, had

laid out, and might have made Laura de Villardin my bride before the next morning. The state of Brittany at that time, and the lax administration of the law, both civil and ecclesiastical, so greatly facilitated any scheme of the kind, that I well knew it was perfectly practicable; but my mind was so completely made up as to the course which I was bound in honour to pursue—the whole of my good feelings were so strongly arrayed against the persuasions of passion, that the proposal made by Lise did not even tempt me for a moment. It was unnecessary, however, to tell her all that had passed; and, assuming as much calmness as I could, I replied, —“ No, no, Lise, such a course is quite unnecessary. Do not agitate your mistress, I beseech you, by telling her that anything has occurred in the château to disturb the usual course of events; but beg her to let me see her to-morrow in the same place in which we have usually met.”

Lise gazed at me with some surprise. “ Will they let you see her then?” she demanded: “ are you sure of being able to come?”

“ Quite sure, Lise,” I replied ; “ so tell her what I bid you ; and take this ring,” I added, giving her one that I had bought in Paris, “ and keep it as a remembrance of me hereafter.”

“ It is a very pretty ring,” replied Lise, taking it, “ and I will keep it for your sake with all my heart ; but, nevertheless, I would much rather that you had given another of a different kind to my mistress this very night. However, I suppose, Monsieur le Baron, you know your own business best, and so I shall meddle no more.”

Thus saying, Lise took her leave, and left me to pass as miserable a night as ever wretch yet spent upon the face of this earth.

CHAPTER VI.

SLEEP was not to be obtained, and I was up long before the dawn. All the château was dark and silent; but as it was in vain to seek that blessed forgetfulness which only falls upon the eyes of toil or happiness, I dressed myself, notwithstanding the obscurity, and, throwing back the casement, gazed out upon the dim and silent world, that lay chill and vague in the fresh depths of an autumnal night.

A heavy dew was falling, spreading a sort of whitish-grey mist over the woods and falls of ground around the Près Vallée; but the sky above was quite clear, and a thousand bright calm stars were looking out, like the eyes of angels watching the dark scene of man's melancholy pilgrimage. The ground mist, however, and the nearer masses of dark trees, and the spangled heaven, were the only objects I could

see as I looked forth, while my ear caught no sound but a light wind stirring the leaves and the faint murmur of the river, whose rarely heard voice showed the profound stillness of every thing else around. Still I gazed out, though it was upon vacancy ; for the fresh night air, as it bathed my feverish brow, seemed to cool the burning of my brain, and quell the fiery thoughts that were passing within. For near an hour I continued leaning upon my arm in the deep aperture of the window, revolving things which took perhaps a more melancholy but a less frensied form as the calmness of the night sunk down into my soul. At length, another sound seemed added to the whisper of the air and the murmur of the stream ; and I fancied that some early shepherd was leading his flock betimes to the pasture of the neighbouring meadows. But presently I heard a distinct step, which seemed to proceed from beneath a group of trees, at about ten yards from the terrace, under which a walk wound along towards the river : and, accustomed as I was to mark the slightest noise, I at once concluded that

it was the footfall of some one who, in walking along beneath the elms, had crossed the gravel. The next moment, as the step lighted on the turf again, I lost the sound; but almost at the same time two figures came a little forward, and paused under the branches of the trees. Had it been any other kind of night than that which it was, I could not have distinguished the two strangers from the ground behind them, but beyond the trees was a deep slope of ground, in which the mist had gathered, white and heavy, and against it both the trunks of the elms and the forms of the men beneath their branches were clearly marked out, though of course it was still impossible to recognise their persons.

I have before remarked that neither Monsieur de Villardin nor any of his household were, generally speaking, matutinal in their habits, and it struck me as extraordinary that any of the servants should show themselves such very early risers as to be out and walking in the woods nearly an hour before daybreak. But I soon found, from the proceedings of the two

men who had caught my attention, that they were none of the inmates of the château. They paused for several minutes under the trees, gazing up at the building and scanning every part of it attentively. They spoke, too, in a low voice, but it was impossible from the distance to hear what they said, though I could distinctly see one of them raise his arm and point to the part of the château in which Laura's apartments lay. My own chambers, as I believe I have before said, were situated in the tower forming a sort of wing to the westward of the other buildings; and in the foot of the tower was a door, which opened at once from the terrace to a staircase which led up to my apartments, to the rooms above them, and to the corridor communicating with the rest of the house.

At the end of a few minutes, the two men advanced leisurely to the terrace, and, mounting the steps, approached the base of the château, seeming carefully to examine the principal door, from which, however, they turned again imme-

diately, and came towards the foot of the tower through one of the windows of which I was watching them. As I was now not above ten or twelve feet above the spot where they stood, I could hear more distinctly what passed between them; and, to speak the truth, they were conversing with a sort of cool and confident nonchalance, which showed that they either cared not who listened, or had no fear of being overheard.

“ I have known this one left open for nights together,” said one, as they approached the door beneath my windows.

“ But, if it were, you would not go in?” replied the other.

“ Not to-night, certainly,” said the first again; “ but if we found that it is still usually open, we could easily come back strong enough to do what we liked.”

“ Ay,” answered his companion, “ but would the priest do his part under such circumstances? I heard him promise to marry them if they came willingly; but——”

“ Give him a thousand francs more, and he

will do any thing," interrupted the first: "I would coin my very blood to do it."

"It would be a glorious booty, to be sure," was the sort of meditative reply; "but, after all, I think we may fall upon a better plan. We should find it difficult to muster sufficient hands. However, if we once get hold of her, we will easily find means to make marriage the best thing she can do."

"Oh, no fear of that," answered the other; and after a few words more that I could not distinguish, they tried the door at the foot of the tower, and finding it locked, retrod their steps across the terrace. For a moment or two they again paused under the elms, and once more scrutinised every part of the building; and then turning through the dell behind, they were immediately lost to my sight.

What could be their purpose? was my first question; and though I certainly could not find a probable answer, yet one fact was evident; — their purpose, whatever it was, was any thing but good. How it might be obviated became the next consideration; and, as I was

about to quit the vicinity for a long time, and did not choose to be suspected of any wish to linger, I saw that the only thing which remained for me to do was to inform Monsieur de Villardin of the facts, and set him upon his guard. As I reflected, however, I saw that I might find no fitting opportunity for putting my intention in execution the next morning, and in all that I was about to suffer, it appeared not improbable that I should forget it altogether. While it was fresh in my mind, then, I determined to write it down, and leave it for the Duke at my departure; and having struck a light, I thus occupied myself till the day mingled its purer beams with the yellow glare of my lamp.

Thinking that if Laura had heard of any of the events which had taken place during the preceding evening, she might be at our rendezvous earlier than usual, I set out as soon as the sun was fully risen; and with a wavering step and beating heart, took my way to the trees at which we usually met. Casting myself down upon the dewy grass, I waited her arrival;

and bitter, bitter were the feelings which filled the next half hour. About to part with her for ever,—about to resign her to the arms of another—all her loveliness and all her gentleness seemed heightened a thousand-fold by the power of regret. Nor were my feelings entirely selfish; at least, if they were so, they strove hard to clothe themselves in a garb of disinterestedness. “If she could be happy herself,” I thought, “half my sorrow would be removed; but to know that my own misery implies hers also, and that she, like me, is destined to a life of sorrow and disappointment, is too, too painful.”

At our usual time of meeting she came; and Lise remained by the bank of the stream, within call, but out of hearing of any ordinary tone. I saw at once that Laura was unaware of any change, and her first words were an affectionate comment upon my pale and haggard looks. I would have given worlds that she had known the whole before we met, for oh, how terrible it was to break to her the approaching end of our communion for ever! How I did it, I can scarcely tell, but her grief and agony

were far more fearful than even I had anticipated. At that moment of bitter sorrow all the treasure of her heart was poured forth. She had no reserve—she had no coldness; and, with her weeping face buried in my bosom, she told me how long and how dearly she had loved me, and traced, in words that only served to render me more miserable, the growth of her affection for me, from her infancy to that hour. I did all that I could, without appearing indifferent or unkind, to calm her, and to persuade her that no course was left either for her or me but to obey the commands of her father; and while I told how deep was my love, how acute was my grief, and how eternal would be my regret, I besought her to forget me, and to strive for happiness, or, at least, tranquillity, in the only way in which it could be obtained.

“De Juvigny,” she cried, clasping her beautiful hands, “I will so far obey my father as never to dream of marrying you without his consent; but I can love none other; my heart is given, and for ever; and I will never perjure myself by vowing to love any man, when I

know and feel that I cannot do so. No, De Juvigny, no; there is a higher duty than even that to my parent; and it cannot be violated. When I looked upon my husband I should think of you, and I should hate him because he was not you. I should drown his house with tears, and show him every hour that I loved another. No, De Juvigny, no," she cried, starting up; "I will fly to my father this instant; I will tell him all and every thing; I will show him the consequences of what he is about to do, and I will entreat him to spare me at least the last and worst part of his will."

As she spoke, she turned, and ere I could even attempt to stay her, she darted away like lightning, all bathed in tears, to cast herself at her father's feet, and implore him to change a purpose which I knew too well to be unchangeable. Lise, who saw her pass, followed quick, and I more slowly, feeling that she had herself put an end to our last interview, and that it could never be renewed. Passing by the door of Monsieur de Villardin's chamber, which was not entirely closed, I heard her voice

mingled with sobs, still entreating her father to yield his resolution. I knew, however, that she would entreat in vain: I knew, too, that means would be found after my departure to sooth her, and to persuade her to acquiesce in the views which had been formed for her by her father; and feeling that to linger longer than necessary was but to inflict additional pain upon her, upon myself, and upon Monsieur de Villardin, I summoned my servants, bade them prepare my horses and baggage immediately, and seeking out little Clement de la Marke, I told him that I was about to set off for Dumont, if he were willing to accompany me. Any change is generally delightful to youth, and the boy, catching at the proposal with rapture, flew to make ready for the journey, while I returned to my chamber, to give the last thoughts to all the agonising pangs of my present situation.

Scarcely had I entered it, however, when I was followed by Monsieur de Villardin. He was pale and much agitated; but nevertheless he did not fail to remark, with his usual kindness, the change which had been wrought in

my appearance by the passing of the last twelve painful hours.

“ You are sadly altered, De Juvigny,” he said, “ and this unfortunate business will be the destruction of us all, if it be not speedily brought to a conclusion. At present it is vain arguing with Laura ; but I need not tell you that at any sacrifice my word must be kept. After you are gone, I trust we shall be able to calm her, and bring her to reason ; but, in the meantime, for the sake of every one, it will be better for us to part immediately.”

“ My lord,” I replied, “ I am ready at this moment, and my servants have orders to lose not an instant in their preparations. In less than half an hour the horses will be on the terrace, and before night I trust to be at Dumont. In the meanwhile allow me to give you this letter, which I wrote to you during the night, fearing that I might not have an opportunity of speaking with you on the subject ere I set out.”

He took it with somewhat of an anxious glance, as if he feared that it might inflict upon

him some new pain connected with the matter which was uppermost in all our thoughts; but I hastened to relieve him. "It refers, my lord," I continued, "to something which I observed last night, while looking out of the window to pass away the time, as I was not inclined to sleep, and which I felt myself bound to make you acquainted with, lest any evil should occur during my absence."

Monsieur de Villardin tore open the letter, and read its contents. "It is strange enough," he said, when he had concluded; "it is certainly strange enough; but we are a great deal too strong in numbers to fear any violence, although I hear that two or three people have been plundered in the neighbourhood of St. Aubin, and that Monsieur de Vins himself was shot at in riding through the forest: however, I will be upon my guard. And now, my dear boy, you must promise to let me hear from you continually. As my affection towards you is any thing but decreased by all that has happened, let me trust that your affection towards me remains unimpaired likewise, though you may

be the sufferer. No one knows better than myself that the human mind can do but little to master affliction and overcome the emotions of the heart: but still it can do something; and I am sure that, for all our sakes, you will exert yourself to the utmost to conquer [the effects of sorrow and disappointment.”

I made no reply, for I knew too well how little one can calculate upon one's own powers in moments of passion or despair. Almost as he had done speaking, one of my servants came in to inform me that the horses were prepared, and that every thing was ready to set out. My heart was too full to take leave of any one, and merely clasping Monsieur de Villardin's hand for one moment in my own, I descended as rapidly as possible to the terrace.

I found Father Ferdinand at the door, embracing little Clement de la Marke before his departure. Old Jerome, the major-domo, and a great many of the servants and attendants were standing round, grave and sad, and evidently aware that something unpleasant had occurred to cause my sudden departure. My

own three servants, booted and spurred, stood holding the horses in front of the house; and, as my eye glanced accidentally over the windows, I saw that many a person was watching to see me set out, though I was afraid of looking farther, lest I should behold what might overcome my resolution. Saying a few words to Father Ferdinand, I walked direct towards my horse; but, as I was going to mount, I found that Monsieur de Villardin himself, anxious to deprive my situation of any unnecessary pain, had followed me out to take leave of me in the kindest manner before all those who were looking on. Laying his hand upon my arm, as I was just about to put my foot in the stirrup, he embraced me affectionately, saying, "Heaven bless you, my dear boy; let me hear from you directly." He then turned, and patted the head of little Clement de la Marke, wishing him a safe journey; and then looked round again to me, with an anxious and even hesitating glance, as if he would fain, fain have yielded all, and forbidden my departure.

I felt that I could bear no more; and leaping

into the saddle, I struck my horse with the spur, and galloped away from the Prés Vallée and the many dear objects that it contained. Those who have lost all that was nearest to their heart on earth may judge what were my feelings for the first ten miles. It were useless to detail all that I experienced;—the bitter disappointment, the burning regret, the swelling of the sad heart, the fire of the agitated brain. I have spoken of it all too much already; and, besides, it is impossible to give any idea of sensations which I do not believe that many can feel, and which those who can feel must know that it is impossible to relate.

My thoughts in regard to Laura were, indeed, a wild chaos of every thing painful and distressing, without form or consistency. Towards Monsieur de Villardin, however, my feelings were more clearly defined; and, notwithstanding all that I suffered, I did full justice to the noble and generous conduct which he had displayed towards me. I saw and felt even then, that his kindness—that his generous sympathy, under the painful circumstances in

which I was placed, would, at some future period, when time should have softened the pangs that it could never cure, become one of the sweetest memories for my after-years, and bind me to that noble-hearted man by a tie that could never be broken. I saw, too, in examining his behaviour, that the memory of all he himself had felt had greatly influenced his conduct. It was the same noble spirit which, moved by passion and by the arts of others to absolute madness, had in former days caused his own wretchedness and misery, that now, divested of any personal passion, softened and purified by long years of sorrow and regret, led him to sympathise deeply and sincerely with two hearts, which he was bound by an obligation he could not violate to tear asunder. His unshaken kindness—the generous confidence that he had reposed in me, which was the more touching from his heart not being naturally a confiding one—the sympathy he had shown—the allowances he had made—all affected me much; and, although I could not but think he was wrong in not permitting

Laura to decide for herself, though I thought that no promise could bind a father to use absolute compulsion with his child, yet his conduct towards myself left me without a word to say, and made me love him the more deeply even while he inflicted the most bitter of disappointments.

These were the only alleviating feelings which my heart experienced, as I rode on towards Dumont. All the rest was bitterness itself; and, although I had by this time made up my mind to the belief that it would be criminal to expose myself to danger in a greater degree now than I would have done upon any other occasion, yet I acknowledge that I was in that frame of mind in which death would have been a relief; and that I should have blessed the hand which took a life that I looked upon as a prolongation of misery through a long and tedious series of years. Such were my thoughts as I rode through a part of the forest in which Monsieur de Villardin had told me that some outrages had lately been committed; and I could not help feeling that if a chance shot

from some of the plunderers that still infested the country were to lay me low, it would be but a happy termination of sufferings to which I now saw no end. Death, however, has his own appointed time ; and as it is vain to fly from him, so also is it vain to seek him ere the moment be come. Nothing disturbed me on my journey, no sign of marauders was visible as I rode along, not a creature did I meet but a forester with his axe upon his shoulder, and a thin priest riding quickly along on his ambling palfrey. Such were the only sights which I saw in the forest, except the tall trees, and the yellow banks, and the jays fluttering and chattering from bough to bough.

Sombre and silent as was every feeling of my bosom, my little page Clement endeavoured in vain to seduce me into conversation while we rode along ; but still nothing could repress the joy of his heart ; and, indeed, no small delight did he seem to experience at the idea of revisiting Dumont, and the scenes in which I had first found him, of all which he had preserved the most perfect recollection, and for which he

seemed to entertain a peculiar regard. After riding about twenty miles, we paused to refresh our horses, and, remembering that the boy's frame was not so strong as my own, I asked him if he were fatigued, and would like to remain for the night at the auberge where we had made our halt; but he declared eagerly that he was not tired in the least, and that he had much rather proceed to Dumont as fast as possible. After a short repose, then, we resumed our journey, and reached the place of our destination before night.

One or two female servants, who had remained in the château, soon put my apartments in order; but still, about the whole place, there was that air of chilly solitude, which every house gains by being left long unoccupied. My own heart had no gay feelings to cheer or enliven it, all the memories associated with every object around me were of the most gloomy and painful description, the sear leaves of autumn were upon every tree, a dull covering of grey vapour veiled the brightness of the sky, a sharp, parching, wind was blowing the

clouds of dust down the dim deserted avenues of the park, while the closed windows of the greater part of the building spoke the want of inhabitants, and the aspect of every thing harmonised too well with the dark and sombre thoughts that crowded my own bosom. I have felt pain, and anxiety, and misery, at different periods of my life, but I never, throughout the whole range of remembrance, can call to mind having experienced such deep despondency as on that night of my arrival at Dumont.

CHAPTER VII.

THE greatest blessing that could befall me, under such circumstances as I have described, was sleep procured by great corporeal exhaustion. I had not closed an eye the night before, I had slept but little on those that preceded it, and now a ride of forty miles, without having taken any sort of refreshment, had greatly wearied me. When I lay down to seek repose, then, I found it; and, though it was far from that sweet, calm slumber which I had known in former years, yet still it was a relief. The first part of the night I was tormented with dreams, and more than once I started up and found myself, ere I was well awake, laying my hand upon my sword, which I had cast down by my bedside on going to rest. Less disturbed repose, however, came with the morning; and, when I awoke, I found that the sun had risen

more than an hour. I was glad that it was so, for my days were without object, and my waking hours were sure to be hours of pain.

Nevertheless it must not be supposed that I abandoned myself weakly to thoughts which were only calculated to unnerve my mind, or that I determined purposely to cultivate the feelings which made life so bitter ; far from it ; I knew, indeed, that those thoughts and those feelings would engross my heart and mind, by whatever means or devices I might attempt to banish them ; but, at the same time, I resolved to do all that lay within my power, to turn my attention to other things, and to occupy myself with studies and pursuits that might give me relief. I laid out many a plan for the day, so as, if possible, to leave not a moment vacant for regret and sorrow to intrude themselves upon me. In the first place, I thought I would read for a couple of hours ; and then I would trace down the bank of the stream, to the spot where the unhappy Duchess de Villardin had perished ; I would then ride out to Juvigny, and, seeing Jacques Marlot, would examine all

that was passing on the estate, and by planning with him every improvement I could think of, would endeavour to furnish occupation for many succeeding days.

In my very first attempt, however, I found how foolish it was to make such calculations. There stood the little library which had been given to me by Father Ferdinand, and certainly it contained many a book which might have afforded matter for instruction, consolation, and amusement ; but I took down one after another and attempted to read in vain. My eyes wandered over the lines, my hands turned the pages, I caught now and then the sense of a sentence or a paragraph ; but, upon the whole, I was reading without understanding, and nine times out of ten I could not have told whether the words were French, or Latin, or Arabic. Fancying that it was something dry and dull in the nature of the good priest's selection which prevented me from attending, I went down to the great library, caused the windows to be thrown open, and chose whatever I thought was most likely to attract and please me : but

it was still the same. Replacing the books, I determined not to attempt to read till my mind was more calm; and, in the meantime, by combining corporeal with mental occupation, to force my thoughts from the channel in which they were so strongly disposed to flow.

I now remembered that I had not seen my little page during the morning, and, on enquiry, found that he had gone out by day-break, and had not yet returned.

He was probably gone to Juvigny, old Marguerite, who had been helping me in the library, observed; for when last he had been there with Father Ferdinand, she said, the boy had never been absent from that place. Indeed he seemed as fond of that fellow Jacques Marlot, as if he were his own father—he might be so too, she added, for aught that ever she could discover. But the boy was a pretty boy, too, and not like that ugly cock-nosed scapegrace.

In despite of all my gloom, the spite of the old woman towards my poor acquaintance,

Jacques Marlot, made me smile for a moment ; and taking my hat, I ordered my horses to be ready in an hour, and walked out to the banks of the stream, in order to see whether the second occupation which I had laid out for myself would be attended with more success than the first. But my walk was in every respect a melancholy one, as, indeed, I might well have anticipated, had I allowed myself to judge as rationally of my own feelings and their associations as I should have done had the case been that of another. My first halt was at the spot where I had rescued poor Laura from the fatal stream that afterwards swept away her unhappy mother ; and as I stood and gazed upon the river, I could not but think how much misery would have been saved us had the dull and sullen water that rolled deep and dark before me taken us both for ever to its silent bosom. Memory, too, exerted all her power, and I could see before the mind's eye the dear girl I loved, in all the smiling happiness of infant joy run bounding on to meet me, as she had appeared the moment before she fell

into the stream. I recalled, too, as vividly as if it had just passed, the heartfelt gladness with which I had grasped her fairy form in the midst of the waters, and the sort of triumphant joy with which I had held her up rescued towards those who watched us from the brink. I remembered it all as if it had been a thing of yesterday; but I remembered at the same moment, my existing situation; and the bitter comment of the present on the past poured like a torrent upon my heart and almost drowned out hope for ever.

I turned away, for in the state of my feelings I would rather have rested in spots, the associations of which were painful in themselves, than in those where happy memories formed a dreadful contrast with present misery. I turned away, then, and walked slowly on to the broken bridge which remained still unrepaired, and was exactly in the state in which it had been left on the night of Madame de Villardin's death, except that a quantity of green mould, and many coloured lichens, had grown over the broken woodwork, telling how many years had

past since the fall of the rest had taken place. Grief, however, finds matter to increase its own stores in every thing; and when I thought of Madame de Villardin's unhappy fate, of her affection for her husband so terribly repaid, of his love for her proving a source of the bitterest anguish to himself, and of all the fearful scenes which I had witnessed and in which I had taken a part, I began to think—without feeling my own unhappiness relieved in the least by the belief—I began to think that the whole world, and every state and station in it were full of misery to the overflowing—that each feeling, virtuous or vicious, was alike prolific of sorrow—and that the only happy being on the earth was the stoic or the anchorite, the pure egotist or the mindless fool.

If I went out gloomy, I returned home more gloomy still, and, mounting my horse, which was by this time prepared, I rode back to Juvigny, and entered the house which I had lent to Jacques Marlot. The good farmer was out, but Madame Marlot, who now presented the very best possible image of a *bonne fermière*,

adorned with fine white muslin, a profusion of lace, and manifold gold ornaments, received me at the gate, and gave me ocular proof of her husband's increasing prosperity. My visit had evidently been expected, and on enquiring for my little page, I was informed that he had been there since an early hour in the morning, but had gone out upon his rounds with Jacques Marlot, who would return with him directly.

The ci-devant printer was not long in making his appearance, and I soon found from his manner that little Clement had informed him that some events had lately occurred to render my mind not attuned to the pleasantries with which he was wont to treat me. He was consequently grave and calm, and though an occasional little drop of acid humour would mix with what he said, yet our conversation passed much as a matter of business; and highly approving of my intention of making improvements, he went over my two farms with me, pointing out all that he thought might be done. We thus planned a new road, and a number of plantations, and having provided employment for myself for

several days in inspecting the progress of the workmen, I returned to Dumont, feeling that at all events I had found an occupation which would distract some of my thoughts from the more painful theme.

Day after day I returned to Juvigny, and carrying on several operations at one time, I had an opportunity of diversifying my amusement; thus waging a sort of incessant war against thought. As soon as I found that painful ideas were obtruding upon me, I changed my place at once, and went to the workmen engaged in some other undertaking; and, thanks to their blessed stupidity, I always discovered some matter to set right or some mistake to rectify. Thus passed my days for more than a fortnight, and though the long dull evenings were still terrible, yet the occupation of my thoughts during the hours of light was in itself a great relief. My little page, wild as the winds, left me almost entirely to myself, and although it had been a part of my plan to fill up my vacant time by pursuing the task of his education, yet my mind was not equal to it; and I

soon found that I could not bend my thoughts to the subject with sufficient application, to do him any good or myself either. Thus from nightfall to midnight my hours were generally spent in walking up and down the great library, sometimes forcing myself to read for a few minutes, but generally giving full course to the thoughts which I contrived to avoid, more or less, during the day.

At length, however, a messenger arrived from the Près Vallée, bringing me letters, which again rendered every effort to occupy my mind perfectly vain. The first was from Monsieur de Villardin, and was full of the kindest and most affectionate language ; but it went on to inform me that the Count de Laval had arrived at the château, and that his marriage was fixed for that day week. Feeling it necessary to inform me of the fact, and yet knowing that every word upon the subject was a dagger in my heart, Monsieur de Villardin wrote as briefly upon it as possible, simply telling me the bare facts, and then adding, “ Laura is calm.”

The next was a letter from Father Ferdinand, but it was more full, more interesting, and yet more painful. I give it, therefore, as it was, so far at least as translation can render it.

“ My dear Son,

“ Although Monsieur de Villardin has written to you himself, I feel it necessary to address you also as one who loves you sincerely, and whose wishes are all for your future welfare and happiness. In the first place, however, let me say, that although I doubt not you may think I outstepped my duty, and interfered, perhaps cruelly, in informing the Duke of the mutual affection which existed between Laura and yourself, yet I had an undoubted right to do so, founded on circumstances which you do not know, but which shall one day be explained to you. In other respects some words that I once let drop, which might tend to encourage your passion, still rest upon my conscience ; but my error in having spoken them is attributable in some degree to Monsieur de Villardin himself, who did not inform me, as he ought to

have done at an earlier period, that he had promised the hand of his daughter to another.

“ *The future husband of Louis de Villardin* is now here, and while I acknowledge my regret that in every respect he does not resemble yourself, yet he seems a noble and dignified man, with whom, I trust, she will find peace, if not happiness. The day of marriage is fixed for this day week, and beyond all doubt it will then take place. Laura is calm and composed, and her mind appears made up to her fate ; but at the same time it is useless to dissemble that she suffers much. In speaking thus, my son, I have the utmost reliance on those good principles which I have marked with pleasure daily taking firmer root in your bosom ; and on those generous feelings which I have often seen make you prefer the happiness of others to your own. I know that man can hardly love woman better than you love her who is now about to become the wife of another ; and I believe that your love for her will not decay ; but I believe at the same time that her tranquillity and peace of mind will ever be your first desire ; and on this

ground I entreat, I beseech, I command you never to see her after her marriage, till long years have calmed and softened feelings that are now too vehement for control. If, indeed, you do love her sincerely, such will be your course; and the blessing of a quiet conscience, and the knowledge of having acted nobly under the most trying circumstances, will follow such conduct, and cannot fail to assuage your grief.

“ Ere long I shall again see you, at least if you remain at Dumont; for as soon as the marriage is over, Monsieur de Villardin and all his family set out for Paris. On the same day I leave the Près Vallée for Rennes, where I shall spend but three days in necessary business, and will then join you. I hope to give you consolation, and at all events to be enabled to afford you some support under the bitter disappointment which you suffer. From these circumstances, and knowing how painful all the details must be to you, I shall not write again till we meet; and in the mean time may God bless and comfort you, and give you strength,

and wisdom, and faith, to bear the dispensation of his will without murmurs or repining."

The effect of these letters upon my mind may be conceived. No occupation now took any hold upon my thoughts; and the whole of the next week was spent in wandering about in a state of despairing wretchedness, that made me almost think the use of my reason would abandon me. I read over and over again the letters which conveyed to me the intelligence of the near approach of my beloved Laura's marriage to another; and, instead of feeling soothed by the terms of affection and consolation which they contained, every word served but to irritate me, and to aggravate my grief. Cruel, cruel did it seem to me, to force the poor unhappy girl, into an union from which her heart revolted, without giving her time even to prepare her mind by thought; or, by contemplation, to habituate her ideas to a change of situation and of duties which implied the sacrifice of her heart's first and strongest affection. Bitterly, in my own breast, did I upbraid Monsieur de Villardin for the

haste with which he proceeded — bitterly also did I upbraid Father Ferdinand for not using all his influence to obtain, at least, a delay of some weeks or months.

From what had fallen from Monsieur de Villardin, when last I saw him, I had certainly anticipated that the marriage would take place much sooner than he had, at first, determined ; but never did I think that only three short weeks would be allowed for Laura to cast me from her heart, and to summon resolution to plight her faith to another : and the agony of mind that I knew she would suffer, as may well be supposed added not a little to my own. Often, often was I tempted to act now, as I most certainly should have acted in former years — to hasten to the Près Vallée, and, exerting all the influence that I possessed over her mind, to persuade her to escape from the trammels which they sought to impose upon her, and, uniting her fate to mine for ever, fly to some distant land, where we might spend the rest of our days in peace. But still a sense of honour and gratitude made me pause and

doubt, till the fatal day at length arrived, and I saw the sun rise and set that was to seal my fate and hers for ever. As it sunk below the verge of the horizon, and the grey, deep night came on, the struggle between duty and passion was over, and nothing remained but despair. My heart was like a field of battle, from which a fierce and fearful strife had passed away, and had left behind nothing but mourning and death.

Shutting myself up in my own chamber, I cast myself down on my bed without undressing, and many an hour passed over my head, uncounted and unmarked, in a sort of dreary stupor, which was in every thing the reverse of sleep; far from being a suspension of thought, it was the rushing of painful ideas through my brain, in such crowded multitudes, that all individual form and distinctness was lost. At length the faint grey light told me that it was dawn, and springing from my bed, with an impulse that I could not resist, I woke the groom, and told him to saddle me my stoutest horse, determined to seek the *Près Vallée*.

“ They are all gone by this time,” I thought ;
“ the house is lonely and desolate like my own heart, and I may at least be permitted to see the spot where last she trode.”

In a few minutes the horse was at the door, and the servants, gazing anxiously upon me, asked whether they might not accompany me ? I replied, somewhat harshly, “ No.” And springing into the saddle, shook my bridle-rein, and galloped off towards Rennes. My gallant horse, which had borne me through many a battle-field, now carried me stoutly on, and, as if he felt the same eagerness which swelled in my own heart, slackened not his pace for many a mile. As I rode through the forest, I heard some distant voices, but my heart and my brain were both too full for me to give any attention to external objects, and the sounds fell upon my ear heard, but not noticed. About six miles more brought me to the first woods of the Près Vallée, and in a few moments, I was standing amongst the tall trees, and beside the lonely grave of turf, where Laura and myself had been accustomed to meet. I

gazed sternly on the spot for a few moments, calling up all the memories which thronged around it, and torturing my own heart with every thought which could render my feelings more bitter. Tying my horse to a branch of a tree, I walked slowly on towards the house, expecting to find it nearly deserted; but I was surprised, when I approached the terrace, to see a number of grooms and servants, apparently busy in their usual occupations. The sight startled me, and, drawing rapidly back, I escaped through the garden, in order to regain my horse without being seen; for, unless the whole household had departed, to enter the *Près Vallée* at such a moment of course never crossed my thoughts.

I now passed quickly through the garden, and was turning towards the door at the other side, when I suddenly heard a low voice calling after me, “Hist — hist! Monsieur le Baron,” and looking round, I beheld old Jerome, the major-domo, pursuing me as fast as his somewhat feeble limbs would permit. I turned towards him, and bade him follow to some place where

we should not be observed ; but he replied, “ O, there is no fear here. They are all gone out, and will be too tired before their return to come walking in the garden.”

There were a thousand questions that I could have wished to ask, but they died away upon my lips ; and had not the old man been as eager to tell as I was to hear, I should have gained no tidings.

“ You have heard the news, sir,” he said, “ you have heard the news ? ”

“ I have heard nothing, Jerome,” I replied, “ except that the family was to quit the Près Vallée yesterday, which is the sole cause of my being here to-day.”

“ Well, then, you have not heard,” continued the old man, with a smile of evident satisfaction brightening up his features, “ you have not heard that the marriage is delayed, and Lise declares she is sure it will not take place at all.”

I thought I should have fallen down dead at his feet, so sudden was the change from despair to hope ; and now, being more anxious than

ever to hear him to an end uninterrupted, I beckoned him out of the gardens, and leading the way towards the grave of the Count de Mesnil, in which direction I knew Monsieur de Villardin would not venture, I besought him to tell me all that had occurred. He began his story with a long tirade against my rival, whose person and deportment seemed equally to have fallen under the old man's disapprobation. I cut short his details, however, concerning the Count de Laval, telling him that I knew him, and that he need not describe him; and he then went on to relate the events which had occurred within the last week.

“Just five days ago,” he said, “when we all thought the marriage was to take place as yesterday, Mademoiselle, — as many of us had fancied she would, — fell ill; and several physicians were sent for from Rennes. The two who came, I hear from Lise, declared that she was ill in body because she was ill in mind; and that Monsieur de Villardin or Father Ferdinand must be her physicians, as they could do nothing for her. Both the Duke and the

Priest went to her immediately, and Lise was sent away, so that she heard nothing more. At length, however, it seems that she obtained permission to see the Count himself, and to tell him all she felt, for he was admitted to her chamber, and, while Lise stood at one end of the room, held a long conversation with our young lady at the other. What it was all about Lise did not hear, though she very well guessed: but, as the Count was going away, he said aloud, ‘As you desire it, madam, I will certainly speak with the good Father, though I do not think he can tell me any thing which I do not know before. But, at all events, rest satisfied that, after the confidence you have placed in me, I will do nothing ungenerous.’

“From all this Lise augured well; but, what between agitation, and terror, and fatigue, my young lady fainted seven or eight times within the hour, after the Count had left her; and at length Lise was obliged to call the Duke and other people to her assistance, as she could not bring Mademoiselle to herself again; and

for some time every one thought she was dead. As soon as she had recovered, she was told that, at the desire of the Count himself, the marriage would be put off for a month; and from that moment she began to get better rapidly. The same evening, I saw the Count walking with Father Ferdinand for nearly three hours; and I always thought that news had been sent to you, for I know that a messenger was despatched that night to Dumont, without the knowledge of Monsieur de Villardin."

"He never came!" I exclaimed. "I never saw him! I never heard of his arrival!"

"That is very strange," said the old man, "for he certainly went, and as certainly returned early yesterday morning. However, yesterday, Mademoiselle was quite well again; but all the preparations for the marriage have been done away. The Count seems very respectful and kind to my young lady. Lise, who knows better about it than any one, appears more happy, and every one thinks that the marriage will not take place at all. To-day, all went out early, with the carriage and a few horsemen,

but they have not returned yet, though Monseigneur said that he would be back before noon, and it is now nearly three o'clock."

The relief that all these tidings gave me was almost too great to bear with any degree of firmness. I could have wept for very joy; and yet, so strange, so unexpected, was the whole, that I scarcely dared suffer myself to entertain the hopes which good old Jerome was so anxious to supply. "The marriage," I thought, "might indeed be delayed; Laura's entreaties and illness might have obtained for her some compassion; but, if the character which I had heard of the Count de Laval were correct, he was not a man to yield easily the hand of the richest heiress in France, or to suffer what he would consider her childish passion for another ultimately to break through the positive engagements which her father had entered into with himself." Such thoughts, of course, tended to calm my joy, and to moderate my expectations; but still the flame of hope was again lighted in my bosom, and infinite, indeed, was the change which had taken place

in all my feelings since I had left Dumont at break of day.

Numberless, however, were still the questions which I had to ask of the old man; for the slightest particular, the most accidental trait, in the events which had occurred, was of course calculated to raise up or cast down my new-found hopes, and was in itself interesting from its connection with the fate and happiness of Laura de Villardin. Thus, with slow and interrupted steps, we were proceeding in the direction which I have mentioned, sometimes pausing to ask a question or to receive a reply, sometimes stopping short to think over all I had heard, and to try to discover what was really the state of the case from the broken information which Jerome could alone afford me, when suddenly, a little way ere we reached the spot where I had left my charger, the sound of a horse's feet, coming rapidly down the neighbouring avenue, made me hasten behind some thick hawthorn bushes, to avoid observation. Jerome, however, remained where he was, and I could hear, from my place of con-

cealment, the horse stop when it reached him, some hasty conversation take place, and then the voice of the old man calling me, for God's sake, to come up. I did so at once ; and, as I emerged from the trees, was not a little surprised to perceive that the person conversing with the old major-domo was a woman dressed in the habit of a Bretonne paysanne, and mounted on a good horse, which she had not quitted, but was speaking as she sat, with all the eager gesticulation of passion and energy. The next moment she turned towards myself, and what was my astonishment as she did so, to behold Suzette, the former maid of Madame de Villardin, and the wife of Gaspard de Belleville.

CHAPTER VIII.

MY surprise at beholding Suzette in a place where she knew that nothing but abhorrence and contempt would attend her, made me pause for a single instant; but she remarked the delay, and exclaimed loudly, “Why do you delay? — Quick! quick! if you are the man you used to be — quick! and save them; or you may come too late.”

“Save whom?” I demanded, still more astonished. “What do you mean, Suzette? you look wild and haggard — what is it brings you here?”

“I am wild!” she answered, “I am haggard! and how can it be otherwise? I that have not closed an eye these seven nights, watching the machinations of two base villains, who, to revenge themselves on you and yours, would sacrifice me too; and leave me to die of grief

and rage, so that they might enrich themselves with the spoils of those they hate! But I am babbling — If you love the Marquis de Villardin — if — if, John Hall, you love Laura de Villardin — as I know you do — for you have been watched under those trees many a day, when you knew not that any one saw you — if you would save her from the shame of wedding that low slave Gaspard de Belleville —— ”

“ Good God ! ” I cried, “ you told me that you were yourself his wife.”

“ I did ! — I did ! ” — she cried, “ and so I am ; but they have taken from me the proofs of my marriage — but mind not that ! Hear me — his wife, indeed, she cannot be — but if you would save her from the shame of marrying him who has another wife still living — follow them, as rapidly as you can, to the forest — ’tis but six miles. Take the road to St. Aubin — then choose the third wood track to the right — you will come to a stream — follow it till you reach the ruins of a water-mill. If you overtake them not before, you will find them at the little chapel under the rocks at the back of the mill.

But, call your men quickly, and spur as if for life, and you will reach them long ere that, for the carriage was dragging but slowly through the sandy ground : — Have I directed you clearly ? — can you find the place ? ”

“ I know it already ! ” I replied, “ I know it already.”

“ Quick, quick, then ! ” she cried, “ seek your followers, mount and begone ! ”

“ I wait for none ! ” I answered, “ you, Jerome, get every servant in the house on horseback — send one to Rennes for a troop of the guards — bring the rest up to the forest like lightning ! Suzette, for your soul’s peace, lead them direct to the spot — you will find me there living or dead — be quick, as you hope for salvation ! ”

“ I *will* be quick, as I hope for vengeance ! ” cried Suzette, the deepest passion of her soul breaking forth. “ Get you on first, then — you may stay them for a time ! We will not be long after ! — Speed, speed ! ”

No time did I lose ; my gallant horse stood ready at the foot of the trees not a quarter of

a mile distant. The length of way that he had come had abated but little of his strength, and the short rest he had found had, in some degree, refreshed him; so that when once I was upon his back, he needed neither whip nor spur. My shortest way was across the river, and dashing quick to the brink, I drew the pistols from the holsters to keep them from the water, and with a light touch of the heel made the horse plunge in. The stream, though deep, was slow, and the beast stemmed it gallantly, strained up the opposite bank, and reaching the road, bore me on towards the forest. It was no time to spare his speed, and I urged him on at the full gallop, looking eagerly towards the dark masses of trees that lay at the edge of the cultivated track before me, when suddenly the horse recoiled from some object lying on the road; and I found that though he had borne me amidst hundreds of dead and dying, yet he had drawn back from a single body lying across the road. It was that of one of Monsieur de Villardin's servants, and the attitude in which he lay, as well as the

quantity of blood which stained the ground around him, showed plainly that the poor fellow was beyond all further care. Forcing the horse to pass, I galloped on, and soon after entered the wood. Never did I forget a road that once I had seen, and now, although the tidings of Suzette had been vague and confused, I advanced direct towards the scene of my former adventures with the robbers and their good captain, Hubert.

The wood track which conducted to the small stream was easily found, and riding on as fast as I could go, I soon reached the river. Here the first object that presented itself was the carriage of Monsieur de Villardin overturned in the deep sandy break of the banks that led to a little ford. The horses, however, had been taken off, and the carriage was left alone, so that it was evident that the accident must have happened some time before; but as I was now within a quarter of a mile of the mill—though it was concealed from my sight by the windings of the stream—I determined to dismount, and pursue the rest of the way on foot,

knowing that if my single hand could do any service to my poor Laura or her father, it would be by caution and surprise. Again fastening my horse to a tree, and placing the pistols in my girdle, I hastened forward till I caught a sight of the mill; but although I could distinguish a number of horses standing tied together round the building, no human being was to be seen. Onward I went, however, well aware how much a desperate man may do against many, although he be single-handed; and I soon heard voices, apparently at a short distance through the wood, to the right. I had never seen the chapel of which Suzette had spoken; but taking the voices for my guide, I crept through the trees as quickly but as silently as possible, trying to repress the eager haste of my heart, by remembering the absolute necessity of caution as well as determination.

A moment after, the voices sounded much nearer, and I caught a glance through the trees of the head and shoulders of an armed man standing with his back towards me, and appa-

rently speaking vehemently to some other persons whom I could not see. Here I was tolerably well concealed by some low thick bushes, but the taller trees were unfortunately stripped of their leaves; and although at the distance of twenty yards farther forward, there was another thick patch of brush-wood, from behind which I could have seen every thing that took place, yet the trunks of the oaks in the intervening space stood bare and separate. I determined, however, to cross the space at all risks; and getting as far back as possible, I glided from tree to tree.

The whole eyes and ears of the party I had seen were otherwise occupied, and at length I found myself behind the bushes I had marked. I was now within twenty yards of the chapel of which Suzette had spoken, and from behind the brush-wood I could behold the whole party I sought assembled in the little open space before it. Placed under a high rocky bank, from which the chapel was partly excavated, stood Monsieur de Villardin and the Count de Laval with their hands tied; and at the dis-

tance of a dozen paces appeared eight or nine musqueteers—with their arms grounded indeed, but evidently arrayed there with no very good intentions towards the prisoners. Within a yard of Monsieur de Villardin lay upon the ground three or four of his servants tied hand and foot, and two of them apparently severely wounded; but a little to the left of these again, so as to be in front of the chapel—which was open, as such buildings usually are—appeared a group of still greater interest. Within the chapel itself stood a priest with an open book in his hand, and before him were placed Laura de Villardin dressed in her morning costume, and Hubert, whom I had already seen in so many capacities, habited in the full and splendid dress of an officer of the guards of the Prince de Condé. Supporting Laura, who otherwise would have sunk to the ground, appeared Gaspard de Belleville; and another armed man behind him again, made up the whole party.

At the moment I turned to observe them, Hubert was speaking vehemently to Laura,

so that his words were perfectly audible. "Will you, or will you not, madam?" he exclaimed. "Seek not to gain time — for it is all in vain. No one can rescue you. And the lives of all those you see depend upon your word!"

"Let him do his worst, my child!" cried Monsieur de Villardin; "let him do his worst. It is better for us all to die together, than that you should become the wife of a villanous plunderer — though, indeed, no such forced marriage would be valid for an hour; and his first step would be from the altar to the gibbet."

"Your pardon, my lord," cried Hubert, with a smile of triumph, "I use no force — I use no compulsion towards the young lady herself; though to be sure, I point out the only means of saving your life. Do not therefore flatter yourself that were she to consent, and I were to set you free, the scaffold would become my bridal bed. No, no, I have taken my measures too well for that; and when I come to claim your daughter's portion, it shall not be till she has been long my wife, and the mother of my children; and then we shall see whether you will hang her

husband or not. Madame," he added, in a sterner tone, "Madame, time wears — I beseech you to spare your father's life. If you refuse me, his blood be upon your head — your own hand draws the trigger that slays him — your own voice pronounces the word. Nor will you then escape me; for you shall be mine by force if not by good will. Speak! — shall I order your men to fire?"

"Oh no, no, no!" cried Laura, clasping her hands in agony, "you will not be so cruel!"

"Will you then consent instantly to become my wife?" he demanded; but Laura turned her weeping eyes to the priest, exclaiming, "Oh, good father, how can you lend yourself to such infamous things as these?"

"How can I help it, lady?" asked the priest: "I am as much under compulsion as you are."

"Another such word as that, old hypocrite," cried Gaspard de Belleville, "shall send the compulsion of a pistol ball through your brain. You came here for gold, not for compulsion, so prepare to do your office. Come, come, Hubert, you do but dally; give her choice, and let

her decide boldly. Bid the men present their firelocks, and then ask her the question. If she say ‘*Yes*,’ let them ground their arms— if she say ‘*No*,’ let it be the signal for them to fire ; so her own voice will give the word.”

“ Ah, surely, surely !” cried Laura, clasping her fair hands, “ surely you will not be so cruel !”

“ You will soon see, madame,” cried Hubert, turning towards his men. “ You will soon see.”

“ Be firm, Laura ! be firm !” shouted Monsieur de Villardin ; “ on your duty, on your honour, yield not a step !”

The moment was now come — I could wait for aid no longer ; and I trusted that previous to my own death, which seemed inevitable, I should be able to give the villains sufficient occupation to enable Jerome and the rest to come up in time to save Laura and her father. Hubert turned towards his men ; and I could see by the knitting of his brows, and the setting of his teeth, that his determination was taken. What Laura’s final reply might be, of course I could not tell. I thought that sooner than see her

father's blood spilt before her eyes, she would say "Yes," at any risk. But I dared not trust to circumstances, and as the chief of the robbers was giving his orders to his men, and while Monsieur de Villardin was exhorting his daughter to die herself and see them all die sooner than yield to the degradation proposed, I drew a pistol from my belt, and gliding from behind the brushwood, was standing at Hubert's side ere any one noticed me but Laura herself.

An exclamation of surprise, not unmingled with joy, broke from her lips; and the villain, startled by the sound, turned full round upon me. I paused not—I uttered not a word—but levelling the pistol at his head, pulled the trigger. The sharp, ringing report satisfied me that nothing had gone wrong, and scarcely pausing to see the dead man fall, I threw away the discharged weapon, caught the other from my belt, and, with one spring forward, seized Gaspard de Belleville by the 'collar and put the pistol to his ear. Thinking that his death would be immediate, he crouched down in terror; but I had other views, and seeing all the musketeers presenting

their weapons towards me, I exclaimed aloud, as if I had been giving the word of command to my own troop, "Ground your arms!"

The effect was electric. Every musquet was grounded at once, and at the same moment the jingling sound of bridles and stirrups coming up at the full gallop struck my ear, and was certainly the gladdest sound I had heard for many a long day.

The robbers caught it too, and easily divining what it meant, I could see them waver with the uncertainty of surprise. The man, however, who stood behind Gaspard de Belleville, set the example of flight, and plunged into the brush-wood which had served me as a place of concealment. The others paused a moment, but the sounds of approaching horsemen becoming louder and louder, determined them to fly, and passing round on the other side of the chapel, they were for a moment lost to my sight. One of them, indeed, before he went, twice raised his musquet to his shoulder and took aim at me, as I stood grasping the collar of Gaspard de Belleville, but each time he again

withdrew his piece, and then ran after the rest as fast as he could go. Anxious to liberate Monsieur de Villardin and his servants, and yet not able to effect it myself, I besought Laura, and commanded the priest, to untie their hands, and both immediately turned to do so.

Ere she had taken a step, Laura, overcome by a variety of mingled emotions which may well be conceived, fainted away, and fell across the step of the chapel. The priest, however, ran forward and slipped the knot from the hands of Monsieur de Villardin; but just as he had done so, and while he was proceeding to execute the same good office in favour of the rest, the marauders, who had been met, in their attempt to escape, by a party of the guards, were driven back into the open space before the chapel, while a large body of Monsieur de Villardin's servants, guided by Suzette, came round by the path which I had followed. The guards from Rennes appeared on the other side at nearly the same moment, and finding themselves hemmed in,

the robbers, who were most of them old soldiers, stood to their arms, and showed their determination to sell their lives dearly. Facing about at the chapel, they received the guards, who pursued them closely, with a steady fire. A number of the horses went over, all became hurry and confusion; and, fearful that the marauders would be driven back over my poor Laura, I thrust Gaspard de Belleville into the hands of some of the servants, and ordering him to be tied tightly, hand and foot, rushed forward to extricate her.

The guards had, by this time, betaken themselves to their fire-arms, with very little discrimination between friends and enemies; shots were flying in every direction; and, through the smoke which now gathered quickly round us, I saw Suzette, who had guided the servants, fall at the feet of her dastardly husband. Monsieur de Villardin, as soon as he found himself at liberty, had snatched the sword of Hubert from its sheath, and, like myself, was rushing on towards the spot where

Laura lay. But at that moment, the marauders gave the guards another volley; and while a ball grazed my cheek and struck off my hat, Monsieur de Villardin fell with his face to the ground. Waving the guards and servants up to close with our adversaries, I cut down one of the men who was again charging his musquet; the soldiers rushed on, and the little phalanx of marauders was broken, but not conquered, for each individual fought to the last with desperate courage.

It was with difficulty that I carried Laura out of the *mêlée*, terrified every moment that some random shot might strike her as I bore her in my arms. The Count de Laval was, by this time, unbound, and rushing up to the affray; but as he was unarmed, I gave Laura over to his care, though I could scarcely even now master my repugnance to see him render her the slightest assistance. Whether he remembered me or not, I cannot tell, but he exclaimed, as he saw me turning back towards the strife that was going on, “Nay, nay, sir,

you have had enough for one day; you take care of the lady; let me have my share."

"You are unarmed, sir, you are unarmed," I replied, "and only risking your life for no purpose. Carry her behind the turn of the rock, and guard her there from danger, for God's sake!"

Without farther words I hurried back as fast as possible, and forcing my way in amongst the combatants, reached the spot where Monsieur de Villardin had fallen. I found him raising himself upon his arm, and, lifting him up, I gazed upon his face to judge whether the wound he had received were dangerous. He recognised me instantly, and the first words he said were, "My gallant boy! my gallant boy! must I always owe you every thing!"

"Laura is safe," I replied, "let me carry you to her;" and raising him in my arms, I bore him round the turn of the road, where I found the Count and several of the unarmed servants endeavouring to recal Laura to herself. Placing Monsieur de Villardin on the bank, our whole cares were now directed towards

him as he was bleeding freely from a wound in his right breast, and every now and then, with a slight cough, his mouth was filled with blood, so that I could not doubt that the shot had passed through his lungs. The external bleeding we soon contrived to stop ; and, beseeching him not to speak at all, I went back to the scene of conflict to ascertain whether it were yet concluded. I found that it was so, and that the guards were standing round the two prisoners they had taken, conversing with all sorts of hurried exclamations over the events which had just occurred.

“ There are a number of wounded men here, gentlemen,” I said, “ who are in need of immediate assistance. Let us ascertain the state of the field, and we will talk of all the rest afterwards.”

“ And pray, sir, who are you ? ” demanded the inferior officer who commanded the party of guards ; “ you may be one of these marauders also, for aught I know.”

“ I am the Baron de Juvigny, sir,” I replied, “ Colonel of his most Christian Majesty’s —

regiment of horse, and bearing the rank of Major-General in the service. You will therefore have the goodness to draw up your men, and assist me in examining into the state of the wounded."

The young officer immediately obeyed; and we found that six of the guards, three of the servants, and nine of the marauders, were either dead or wounded. Only two prisoners, as I have said, were made besides Gaspard de Belleville, who, for his part, stood with his arms tied behind him, glaring sullenly upon the form of Suzette, who was lying weltering in her blood, which not all the efforts of good old Jerome seemed to have the slightest effect in stanching. Many a muttered reproach, too, was her brutal husband pouring upon her head for having betrayed him and his companions; and, as I came up, she replied feebly, "It was your own fault. I could have put up with your cruelty. You might have turned plunderer or marauder without my opposing you; but when you sought to marry another woman, while I was

still living, you did that which is not to be forgiven."

"Fool!" cried the brute, in reply, "I sought to marry no other woman. It was your brother! —He whom you have murdered, by bringing that infernal English fiend upon us — he it was who was to have married her. It was his fortune I sought to make, while I avenged myself at once upon the man who has marred mine through life, who has met me and thwarted me at every turn, and upon the old dotard, who has lent his aid to crush me, and to raise yon worm from the dunghill. It was your own mad wild folly that made you think that I wanted to marry her!"

"Then why did you take from me the proofs of our marriage?" said Suzette. "Why did you leave me at St. Aubin, and not let me know where you were going?"

As such recriminations were not at all likely to do any service to the poor wretch Suzette, I ordered Gaspard de Belleville to be removed to a distance from his wife, and his person to be searched in order to discover, if possible, all

the particulars of the unfortunate affair which had just taken place. I then turned to give directions for bringing up litters and other conveyances to carry away the wounded, with as little inconvenience to themselves as possible; but at that moment, I was joined by the Count de Laval, who grasped my hand, with greater signs of friendship than I could find it in my heart to return.

“Monsieur de Juvigny,” he said, “you will be glad to hear that Monsieur de Villardin seems better, and that the bleeding internally as well as externally seems entirely to have ceased. Mademoiselle de Villardin also has recovered, and wishes to see you. Let me beg you to accompany me.”

“I follow you, sir,” I replied: and, still holding my hand in his, with a smile upon his lip that I neither liked nor understood, he led me back to the spot where I had left Laura and Monsieur de Villardin. The Duke was seated on the bank, pale, but apparently not so much injured as I had imagined. Laura leaning beside him, held one of his hands in hers,

and gazed anxiously on his face. She, too, was very pale; but, as I came forward, with the Count still holding my hand, a bright blush spread itself over all her countenance.

“Mademoiselle de Villardin,” said the Count, “here is your young friend come in person to show you that he is unhurt; and let us altogether offer him our thanks for the important service that he has rendered us——” He paused a single instant, and then added, “Monsieur de Villardin, believing it to be impossible that any young lady can have been brought up from infancy with so worthy a gentleman, without having felt for him affections that ought not to be disappointed, and being myself the last man to take advantage of accidental circumstances to seek my own happiness at the expense of others, allow me to propose that all engagements between you and me should be considered as henceforth null and void; and, if you will follow my counsel, you will join these two hands for ever with your blessing:” and, as he spoke, he placed that of Laura in mine.

Monsieur de Villardin did not venture to

reply ; but, while Laura, with a burning cheek and glittering eyes, gazed earnestly upon his face, he laid his hand upon ours, as they were clasped together, with a gentle pressure which was quite confirmation enough. Laura spoke not, and my heart was too full to permit the use of words. The silence became embarrassing to all parties ; and the very intense happiness that thrilled through my heart showed me, for the first time in life, that joy can reach such a height as to be, in some degree, even painful.

We were relieved by the approach of the young officer, who had commanded the guards ; and who now came to report that, as soon as the litters arrived, every thing was prepared for our return to the Prés Vallée. He would have the honour of escorting us thither, he said ; and, in the mean time, he gave into my hands the only paper which had been found upon Gaspard de Belleville. It proved to be a written agreement between that scoundrel and a person calling himself Hubert Hubert, by which the worthy captain stipulated that, when,

by the means and with the assistance of Gaspard de Belleville, he should have obtained possession of the person of Mademoiselle de Villardin, and married her, he would make over to the said Gaspard one half of whatever portion or dowry he might force Monsieur de Villardin, at any after period, to bestow upon his daughter. It was also expressly stipulated, that Hubert was to carry his bride to the Colonies, for the space of one year; and that he was likewise to provide a passage for Gaspard de Belleville and his wife; with various other articles of the same kind, all showing that the villains had calculated upon Monsieur de Villardin's making up his mind, at the end of a certain period, to recognise the marriage, however informal in law, and to receive the daring villain who had accomplished it, as his son-in-law.

A number of letters and papers however, which were found upon the body of Hubert, clearly proved that the scheme had not been laid by him, but had been suggested by Gaspard de Belleville; and it was very evident, from every circumstance connected with the

whole affair, that the desire of vengeance, both upon myself and upon Monsieur de Villardin, had taken fully as much part as rapacity, in the whole design. That Gaspard de Belleville and his ruffian brother-in-law had been lingering about in the neighbourhood of the Prés Vallée, for many weeks, was clear, both from the circumstances which I had observed on the night before my departure for Dumont, and from the fact of Suzette having informed me that I and Laura had been watched for many a day, in our morning meetings at the grave of Monsieur de Mesnil; and thus it was, in all probability, that Gaspard de Belleville had learned the means by which he could most bitterly wring my heart, as well as that of Monsieur de Villardin. The villains had been caught in their own scheme, it is true; but a sad number of innocent persons had suffered as well as themselves.

To me, on the contrary,—as soon as I began to entertain hopes that the wound of Monsieur de Villardin would not prove of a serious nature,—the whole seemed to promise unequalled joy: and, as I sat upon the bank beside Laura, speak-

ing, every now and then, a few words of hope and affection to her; and conversing more frequently with the Count, who now took upon himself the arrangements of all our after-proceedings; I fondly fancied that every difficulty was overcome, that every danger was averted, and that the whole current of my days was thenceforth to flow on in peace and happiness.

Whoever entertains such a dream will have to drink the bitter cup of disappointment; but still the vision, though it last but for an hour, is the brightest thing that imagination, amongst all its pageants, can conjure up. In this state passed nearly an hour and a half: but, at the end of that time, the tidings having been spread by Jerome's first messenger to Rennes, and the rumour having found its way—by all the thousand invisible channels which convey reports about the world—to half a dozen different places in the neighbourhood of the forest, litters, and carts, and horsemen, and pedestrians, began to arrive; and, placing our wounded in various conveyances, we commenced our march in long and slow procession once more towards the Prés Vallée.

CHAPTER IX.

THE day was just at its close as we issued forth from the forest, and took our way towards the bridge which crossed the river. I followed the procession on horseback amongst the last; and the whole scene, associated as it was with many deep interests and strange memories, was one of the most beautiful and extraordinary that ever my eye beheld. It was a splendid autumn evening, with the sun pouring his setting beams from the west, amidst scattered clouds tinged with every glorious colour that the mind can conceive. The long line of litters, and carriages, and horsemen, and foot, was winding slowly down the slope, which led from the edge of the wood towards the stream; and far and wide beneath my eyes—with every undulation marked by its own peculiar shade, and every building or group of trees casting long purple shadows as they cut off the rays of the declining sun—lay the rich wide lands of Brittany; while round

about me, dark and heavy with the evening twilight, rose the broken masses of wood, with the thousands of wild banks and thorny dingles, which skirted the verge of the forest. The peculiar rich light of the hour, too, spread over all the scene ; and, catching here and there upon the bright arms and gay dresses of the soldiers and the servants, marked the different points in the procession ; while every now and then, even in the more distant prospect, it touched some glistening object, and made it start forth, like a diamond, from the dark lines of planting or the grey slopes of the hills, not unlike one of those bright goals which youth fixes for its endeavours through life, as it stands upon the verge of manhood, and contemplates the distant future, while imagination flashes brilliantly on the object of desire, and lends it a lustre not its own. There was a fascination in the moment, and the scene, and the feelings of my own heart, not to be resisted ; and I reined in my horse, for a single instant, to gaze upon the prospect, and then followed on, thinking, that if the beauties of nature be a sub-

stantial blessing to man, how much does his appreciation of them depend upon the state of his own bosom. A few hours before, I might have ridden through Tempe at day-break, without noting that there was any thing lovely before my eyes ; and now, I could not have passed a quiet dell, or a bubbling brook, without feeling that the whole world is beautiful.

I had lingered a while behind the rest in order to hear the report of a party which had been sent to examine the mill, at which I doubted not that Hubert and his companions had established their chief rendezvous : but nothing was found there which could lead to any further discovery ; and, as soon as the other horsemen overtook me, I rode on ; and, easily passing the rest of the cavalcade, acted as their harbinger at the Prés Vallée. I found Father Ferdinand in no small agitation ; but before giving him any particulars of the events which had occurred, I despatched messengers to Rennes for every sort of medical assistance, and then relieved more fully the good father's anxiety concerning Monsieur de Villardin and Laura.

“Are you sure, are you sure, that he is not much hurt?” he asked eagerly, referring to Monsieur de Villardin.

“The wound certainly, at first, appeared a very serious one,” I replied; “but by the speedy cessation of the hemorrhage, and the want of that great weakness which I have generally seen follow very dangerous wounds, I trust there is nothing to be apprehended.”

“God grant it!” replied the priest, “God grant it!” and after gazing upon me for a moment or two, he added, “and what is to become of you, my son?”

I understood the meaning of his question fully, and replied, “As far as I have been enabled to judge, good Father, there exists no further necessity for absenting myself. The Count de Laval resigns all claim to the hand of Mademoiselle de Villardin, and the Duke does not show any desire to bid me return to Dumont. But—ere we are interrupted—I hear from good old Jerome, that you despatched a messenger to me some days since. He never reached me.”

“ No, no !” cried Father Ferdinand hastily, “ No, no.—It is a mistake. I despatched no messenger to you, my son. But, hark ! I think I hear the horses’ feet,” and he turned to the window to look out.

He was mistaken however; and some minutes more elapsed before the cavalcade made its appearance. Our first care was, of course, of Monsieur de Villardin; but though he spoke only a few words, in an under voice, for fear of irritating the wound in his breast, and consented immediately to go to bed, yet he walked up the stairs with so much strength, that our apprehensions on his account were nearly done away.

The servants and soldiers who had been wounded, were disposed of in various parts of the building; and I aided in carrying the unhappy Suzette to a chamber on the ground floor, as she seemed to suffer so greatly from the slightest motion that we feared to convey her to a more convenient apartment. As soon as we had laid her upon her couch, I was turning to give what assistance I could in the other arrangements, but she beckoned me eagerly

back, saying, in a low husky voice, "I would speak with you, sir! I would speak with you alone!"

She was evidently dying, and of course her request was not to be refused. Desiring the servants, therefore, to attend to the safe keeping of Gaspard de Belleville, I bade them leave me; and, closing the door, approached the bedside of the unhappy woman, whose moments in this life were waxing few.

"Monsieur de Juvigny," she said, in a voice so faint and inarticulate, that it required great attention to catch the meaning of her words; "Monsieur de Juvigny—I would fain tell you something which may be of service both to you and to the Duke.—Do you remember when I told you my history once before, I said I had a third motive for bidding you repeat it to Monsieur de Villardin?"

"Well—very well!" I replied; "but my good Suzette, be as brief as possible; for you are wasting your strength, and you may yet need all you have left."

"You need not hear me, unless you please,"

she answered peevishly, and then continued in the same low and irregular voice, “ Well, I was saying, that I had a third motive—it was this, that I knew something that no one else knew ; and I knew it, because, after I was sent away from Dumont, I lodged for some time in the house of old Madame —— ”

I lost the name, and her voice became more and more indistinct, but still she went on :—
“ She used to attend sick people, you know, at Estienne ; and though she had been sworn to secrecy, yet —— ”

But her words became quite unintelligible ; and perceiving that I did not understand her, she paused, and gazed in my face with a painful stare of anger and disappointment, as if my want of attention had been the cause of my not comprehending what she said. I saw that death was approaching fast, and I asked, in charity, “ Would you wish to see your husband, Suzette ? ”

She made an effort to raise herself upon her arm, as she exclaimed distinctly, “ I hate him ! ” but immediately sunk back upon the pillow.

In answer to another question, as to whether she would wish to see a minister of religion, she raised her hand, and bowed her head, in token of acquiescence; and, rising, I proceeded to seek for Father Ferdinand.

I was told that he was in the chamber of Monsieur de Villardin, with Laura and old Jerome Laborde; and, taking the liberty which had always been granted me of entering the Duke's apartments in the hours of sickness, I proceeded immediately thither, in search of the good confessor.

Father Ferdinand was engaged in writing a paper for Monsieur de Villardin, who, as I entered, held up his finger to me to keep silence till it was completed, which was not long in being done. The Duke then read it over attentively, and, turning slightly in his bed, affixed his signature to it. The Count de Laval, who was also in the room, next advanced and took the pen; and I could see the eyes of Laura, who was sitting by her father's pillow, glance from him to me, beaming up as they did so, with a look full of affection and hope. When

the Count had signed it, Laura also put her name ; and Jerome and Father Ferdinand added their own, as witnesses.

“ Monsieur de Juvigny,” said Monsieur de Villardin, speaking in a low voice, which was evidently modulated from caution more than from weakness, “ what were you going to say ? ”

“ I was merely about to tell Father Ferdinand,” I replied, “ that that unhappy woman, Suzette, is below, dying, and that she requires the aid of the church, with speed.”

Father Ferdinand instantly rose to seek her ; but Monsieur de Villardin made a sign to him to pause for a moment ; and, beckoning me closer to him, he gave me the paper which he had just signed. “ Although I believe that I have been much nearer death than I am at present,” he said, “ yet as all wounds such as I have received are uncertain in their consequences, I have thought fit, my dear boy, as far as possible, to put your happiness, and that of my dear Laura, beyond further doubt. If I survive, I myself will join your hands ; if not, that paper

will remove all difficulty on the part of others. Nay, do not thank *me*, de Juvigny : Monsieur le Comte here has behaved most nobly, and requires the gratitude of all ; but I have only acted now as I should have acted long ago. Now, my dear sir," he added, speaking to the confessor, "seek the poor creature who desires your presence. Perhaps when the surgeons arrive, I may wish you and de Juvigny to be with me also ; but in the mean time I would willingly pass half an hour alone. Nay, leave me, dear Laura, and look not sad. Things will go well, I am sure."

We all, accordingly, left the room. Father Ferdinand betook himself to the bedside of Suzette. The emotions in the bosom of Laura, both pleasurable and painful, were too many and too mixed to admit of words, and she immediately retired to her chamber ; while old Jerome proceeded to bustle about in discharge of the various functions of his office, so that the moment after we had left Monsieur de Villardin, the Count and myself were left alone. My feelings towards him at that instant would not be very easily defined even now ; nor did I

very well know how to demean myself towards him, so as to express my sense of his noble and feeling conduct, without abating my own dignity.

“Monsieur le Comte,” I said, after some slight hesitation, “you have acted nobly and generously towards me, and, therefore, I have to return you my thanks, which I do most sincerely, for pursuing a line of conduct that, doubtless, was the best calculated to promote your own happiness also, but which, most certainly, has ensured and restored mine.”

“You owe me no thanks, Monsieur de Juvigny,” he replied; “having had few opportunities of cultivating the pleasure of your acquaintance, I cannot be supposed to have been actuated by any feeling of personal interest towards you. The fact is, that Mademoiselle de Villardin, some days ago, gave me to understand that her affections were irrevocably bestowed upon another; and, however highly I might esteem the honour of Monsieur de Villardin’s alliance, of course I did not covet the hand of a young lady, whose heart, I clearly saw, I could never hope to possess. Other circumstances

combined, I acknowledge, to fix my determination; but once having resolved upon resigning all claim to the honour intended for me, I saw no reason why I should not do my best to make her happy, who had frankly informed me that she could never make me so. Thus you see that you have no cause to thank me, though I do not deny that it gives me great pleasure to serve a gentleman every way so deserving as yourself."

This was spoken in that calm, polite, ceremonious sort of tone, which put all feeling out of the question, and which seemed perfectly intended to stop every thing like an expression of gratitude. Such being the case, I, of course, said no more upon the subject, and the Count, at once, turned the conversation to the events which had lately occurred.

"It seems to me evident, Monsieur de Juvigny," he said, "from all I have been enabled to gather, that this attack upon our party has been long concerted, and that nothing has prevented its execution before but want of opportunity. I am curious, however, I acknowledge, to ascertain how such a scheme could be long

carried on without being divulged by some accident or other. These people, it is evident, must have watched us for some time, and must also have been very thoroughly acquainted with all that was passing here."

"I doubt not that they were, my Lord," I replied: "but, in regard to their schemes not having been discovered, you are, in some degree, mistaken; for the night previous to my departure from this place, about three weeks or a month ago, I myself observed two men examining the château, late at night, and heard a part of their conversation, which, though it certainly did not afford me any accurate information, at all events served to show me that some evil design was in progress. With these facts I made Monsieur de Villardin acquainted; but it appears that, confiding in the number of his attendants, he did not take the necessary precautions."

"It seems," replied the Count, with a smile that I did not particularly like, "it seems that you were more watchful over our safety. Nay, do not look offended, Monsieur de Juvigny, I

mean nothing that should in the least hurt you, thinking it very natural that a young lover should hover round his mistress, although he might think that she was lost to him for ever."

"At all events, Monsieur le Comte, your conclusion is, I can assure you, wrong. The fact is, that I received information some time ago from Monsieur de Villardin himself, purporting that the marriage of his daughter was to take place yesterday; and that he himself, with all his family, were to set out immediately for Paris. Concluding that this was the case, I felt myself at liberty to return to scenes that were dear to me; and, on my arrival, was met by the woman who informed me of your situation, and directed me to the spot where you had been carried. I am still, however, ignorant of all the events which preceded my finding you in the forest, and I would fain ask a detail of them, were it not trespassing too greatly on your time."

"Oh! the whole business is very soon related," replied he. "Mademoiselle de Villardin being so much better, and able to take the

air, her father determined to accompany her in the carriage, while I, with four servants, escorted them on horseback. After passing the bridge at — I forget the name of the place — we went on for a about a mile or a mile and a half towards the forest, intending to turn back ere we reached it, when suddenly, as we were passing between two hedges, we were saluted by a volley of musketry, which instantly brought three of the servants to the ground, and wounded my horse so severely as to make him fall with me. At the same time the carriage was surrounded, Monsieur de Villardin seized and tied before he could make any resistance; and I, sharing the same fate, was placed beside him and Mademoiselle in the carriage. The ruffian you shot, and his companion, as well as another personage of the same stamp, took their places beside us. Two of the servants who were wounded, as well as the rest who were made prisoners, were forced to sit on their horses, and follow the rest; and we were soon carried off into the heart of the wood, leaving none but one of the poor fellows, who

had been killed upon the spot, behind us. All this occupied a considerable time, and I was in hopes every moment that some one, attracted by the sound of musketry, might come up, and at least carry the news to the town. But in this wild province one might as well be in a desert. No one appeared, and we were dragged on into the wood, without the slightest power of resistance. Luckily, however, the road was so bad and sandy, that we made but slow progress; and, at length, as good fortune would have it, just as we were going to cross the stream, the carriage was overturned, and stuck immovable in the sand. You may easily imagine that we afforded no great assistance to our conductors, and did not make our movements any quicker than we were compelled to do. — Thus at least half an hour was consumed in endeavouring to move the carriage, and in getting us out of it. We were then forced to walk forwards for a considerable distance to an old mill, which seemed at some former period to have been destroyed by fire; and here, all our horses having been tied to the building, we were

again marched forward to the little chapel where you found us, and where we were received by another of the band, who seemed to have a priest in his custody, though, I must confess, the worthy clerk did not appear to be under any very great restraint. I had remarked, as we went along, that one of the leaders of our assailants had paid considerable attention to Mademoiselle de Villardin, and had also learned, from some words that Monsieur de Villardin let fall — though they took care, with pistols at our throats, to keep us from much conversation — that the other personage, who seemed to take a lead amongst them, had formerly been a page in this family. I was thus the less surprised when, on reaching the chapel, the former coolly proposed to Mademoiselle de Villardin to become his wife ; and, as a sort of mild inducement, informed her that, unless she instantly consented, he would shoot her father, myself, and all the other prisoners before her eyes. Of course a considerable discussion took place upon this point, which was cut short by your punishing the villain as he deserved ; and

with every thing else that occurred, you are, perhaps, better acquainted than I am."

"The only matter that I do not know," I replied, "and which I had forgotten till this moment, is the fate of the priest, whom I do not remember to have seen after the beginning of the affray."

"Oh! I marked him well," replied the Count. "He slipped away into the wood as fast as possible; and, as his clerical dress probably saved him from interruption on the part either of the servants or the soldiers, he was, no doubt, soon far enough from the scene, of conflict."

The arrival of the surgeons at this moment interrupted our further conversation; and, according to the desire which Monsieur de Villardin had expressed, I proceeded to the chamber where I had left Suzette, in order to call Father Ferdinand to accompany the medical men to the Duke's chamber. Knowing that the unhappy woman, even before I left her, had been incapable of making confession, except by signs, I did not hesitate to open the door, and

I found the good priest still standing by her bedside, but no longer engaged in offering the consolations of religion, which now could have fallen alone upon the deaf ear of the dead.

“ It is all over, my son,” he said, as he saw me. “ Have the surgeons arrived ? ”

I replied that they had, and he immediately followed me to the saloon where I had left them, whence we again proceeded to the chamber of Monsieur de Villardin. We found him perfectly composed, and willing to submit to any thing that the medical men might think proper. But, after examining the wound, questioning their patient, and consulting long amongst themselves, the surgeons judged it not expedient even to attempt the extraction of the ball ; but applied themselves, as far as possible, to prevent any fever ensuing from the wound, and determined to leave nature herself to do what she could to relieve their patient, before they endeavoured to assist her by the resources of art. When they had done every thing that they thought fit, they left one of their number in the chamber of the Duke, to watch every

turn in his case ; and then, accompanied by the confessor and myself, proceeded to visit the servants and soldiers who had been wounded. As we went, Father Ferdinand, I remarked, anxiously questioned the principal surgeon upon the state of Monsieur de Villardin, and as to whether there existed even a chance of immediate danger. The surgeon replied, that he saw none whatever. The hemorrhage, he said, having spontaneously ceased, showed that no great blood vessel had been injured, and that all that was now to be feared was subsequent inflammation taking place amongst some of the most delicate organs of the human frame. Satisfied with this assurance, Father Ferdinand only requested that immediate information might be given to him, on the first appearance of any dangerous symptom, reminding the surgeon that, as Monsieur de Villardin's confessor, he had very important duties to perform towards him, as soon as it was ascertained that he was in perilous circumstances. " I need not tell you, sir," he added, " that, with a man of Monsieur de Villardin's nerve, the knowledge

that he is in danger would in no degree tend to impede his recovery."

The surgeon promised to give him timely notice; and, on visiting the other wounded persons, we found that only one was beyond hope, while all the rest bade fair for a speedy recovery. It may as well be mentioned here, that they all did recover but one, who, — as well as the servant I had seen lying on the road, and another who had been killed in our conflict with the robbers, — was buried a few days after, together with Suzette, in the chapel of the château.

The party of the guards from Rennes, who had arrived so promptly to our aid, remained at the Prés Vallée all night; and, as it was late before all the events which I have mentioned had taken place, I sent up old Jerome Laborde to Laura's apartments to know whether she thought fit to come down to the supper table. She declined, however, as I had expected; and, as Father Ferdinand also retired to his own chamber, indisposed by all the scenes which he had just gone through to partake in

any thing like mirth or festivity, I was obliged to do the honours of Monsieur de Villardin's table to the Count de Laval and the commander of the guards from Rennes, though I would much rather have been permitted, in silence and solitude, to think over all the events that had occurred, and to offer up my thanks to Heaven for the change from the deepest misery to a state of happiness, which my bitter repinings, under a temporary affliction, had, I confess, but little deserved. The young officer, with all the thoughtless gaiety of his age and his profession, drank deep and sat long, and might, indeed, have continued his carousings to a much later hour, if the Count, who, for a time, had been amused with his liveliness, at length getting tired, had not risen unceremoniously, and wished him good night. The young officer looked at me with a wistful glance, to see whether there was any chance of prolonging his potations with me; but my glass, which had long been vacant, gave him a sufficient reply, and, drinking one deep draught to

our good repose, he once more visited his troop, and then betook himself to rest.

As all was now becoming quiet in the château, and, one after another, its different inhabitants were dropping off to their beds, I sought out my old friend Lise, and charged her with a message to her mistress, expressing a hope that I might have an interview with her the next day. Lise gave me, with a smile, the certain assurance of my request being complied with, — especially, she said, as she herself intended to go to Rennes, and her mistress would want some companion who knew how to take care of her. She was going on in the same strain, with a good deal of harmless conceit borne lightly forth to her tongue, on the full current of joy, — the floodgates of which had been opened in her heart by all the news she had received from her mistress — but some persons passing to their beds interrupted our conversation, and I proceeded once more to the apartments of Monsieur de Villardin. By means of his ante-chamber and dressing-room, I was enabled to enter without disturbing him; and, sitting quietly

down by the surgeon, I remained the greater part of the night, anxious to see how it passed with his patient. At first he was somewhat restless, but towards morning he fell into a tranquil sleep ; and, auguring better from all I now saw, than I had before fully permitted myself to hope, I left his apartments at about three o'clock, and retired to rest.

CHAPTER X.

THE fatigue which I had endured throughout the preceding day had been unfelt during the time that I passed in active exertion; but the moment my head touched the pillow an overpowering sense of drowsiness fell upon me; and without any of that consciousness of falling asleep — which has, perhaps, something awful in it, from the sensible relinquishment of intelligent existence — I passed into a state of utter forgetfulness, which lasted between seven and eight hours. On waking I felt that I had slept long; and dressing myself as fast as possible, I hurried down to the saloon, in which, as a sort of rallying point for the whole household, I was sure to find some one. My delight may be supposed, when the one that I did find was my own beloved Laura. To bound forward towards me, as she had done from infancy, was her first emotion, and to it she yielded without

fear, feeling, as I, too, felt, that the pain and the apprehension which for many a day had hung upon our morning meetings, were now cleared away, like clouds from the sun, and that all was happiness.

“ You have slept long, De Juvigny,” she said, looking up in my face with a smile; “ you have slept long, and you look happy !”

“ I have slept long and deeply, my beloved,” I replied; “ but remember, that for the last eight nights I have hardly known what sleep is.”

The tears rose in Laura’s eyes; but those tears that spring, in moments of joy, from the recollection of past sorrows, are not amongst the least sweet things of life. “ I wish, De Juvigny,” she replied, “ I wish that all the hours of sleep which, during these eight days, fled from my pillow also, could have gone and rested upon yours. But little repose, indeed, have I known myself; and of course my thoughts, through those long tedious nights, were not rendered less sorrowful by thinking of all that you were suffering at the same time. But let us not remember any thing unhappy now. My father

has passed a very tranquil night, and the surgeon assures me that there is but little chance of his wound proving dangerous."

"Is Monsieur de Villardin awake, then?" I demanded.

"He has been so for some time," she answered, "and is now sitting up speaking with the Count, who, finding my father so much better, has determined to set out to-day for Paris, glad to leave our dear Brittany, and what he calls its semi-barbarous inhabitants — and our gloomy château — and poor Laura de Villardin — and to betake himself to courts and cities, and scenes and people, much better fitted to him than any he has met with here."

She spoke with all the playful gaiety of former days; but I knew my dear Laura too well to believe that she would even have jested in regard to a man who had behaved so generously as I believed the Count to have done, had she not known some trait in his character which might detract a little from the apparent liberality of his conduct. She felt sorry, however, even for the slight touch of bitterness that had

mingled with her words, almost as soon as they were spoken ; and added, “ It is very wrong of me, I believe, to feel so glad of the departure of a man who has behaved so kindly to us ; and who, with the power, and, perhaps, with some inducements to make us very miserable, has, on the contrary, made us very happy ; but I cannot help it, De Juvigny ; and the very feelings which I detect in my own heart now, make me tremble to think what would have been those I should have experienced, had I been forced to marry a man I could not love. But go now to my father, who is anxious to see you too ; and your presence will probably break off his conversation with the Count, which I am sure has continued too long for his health already.”

I lingered a moment or two more, and then proceeded to the apartments of Monsieur de Villardin, where I found the Count in the act of taking his leave. Father Ferdinand, also, was present ; but as the good priest remained with the Duke, I was commissioned to do all due honours to the departing guest, and it would be vain to deny that I felt the same satis-

faction on seeing him enter his carriage, and quit the Prés Vallée, that Laura had so artlessly expressed. I was about to seek another moment of happiness with Laura ere I returned to the chamber of her father, when the young commander of the guards stepped up to me and begged a few minutes' conversation. Of course I could not refuse; and taking him into the library as the nearest vacant apartment, I requested him to state his commands.

“Why, the truth is, Monsieur le Baron,” he said, with a somewhat rueful air — “the truth is, one of our prisoners has contrived to slip through our fingers.”

“Which? Which? Not the one I myself made?” I cried — fearing that it might be Gaspard de Belleville, and feeling now convinced, from all that had happened during the last ten years, that it was not quite so necessary, or so indifferent, to have even one bitter enemy loose in the same world with us, as I had once thought it — “Not the one I made myself, surely?”

“The very same,” answered the young officer.

“ However, I trust there is no great harm done; for it matters little which way such a fellow meets his death. If he had been taken alive to Rennes, he would have been hung, of course, and now he has but broken his neck. So it makes little difference.”

“ Broken his neck!” I exclaimed. “ Explain! explain! my good sir!”

“ Yes!” he answered; “ he has simply broken his neck. The fact was, you were all so busy last night, and so much occupied with Monsieur de Villardin and Mademoiselle, that we were obliged to dispose of him as well as we could; and therefore, as the safest place, we put him up in the small room at the top of the west tower. There is a buttress, you know, runs down the side just between the windows, with a sort of steps upon it as it grows thicker; and it would seem that by this means he fancied he could make his escape. He must have fallen, however, in trying to reach the buttress, for his body was found quite dead, and cold, almost exactly beneath the window of the chamber in which he was confined.”

I remembered, as he spoke, having in boyhood performed, as a feat, the descent from that very window, while Gaspard de Belleville had stood by and looked on, declaring that nothing was so easy, and that any one could do it if they took the trouble of trying. Little had I thought at the time that the very attempt would prove the cause of his death ; but I clearly perceived that the remembrance of my boyish feat, and the apparent ease with which it had been performed, had induced the unhappy man to make an effort for escape by that means.

In answer to my enquiries regarding the hour at which the body had been found, the young officer replied : “ Oh, it was early this morning. I was about to march, as, of course, it is my duty to return to Rennes as soon as possible, though I thought it right, for the safety of the château, to remain all last night.”

I smiled, and remarking that I did so, he went on, with a smile, in return : “ It was as I said, early this morning, but although I caught a glance of Mademoiselle de Villardin a few moments ago, I thought it useless to speak

with her about it, as she has seen more of cutting throats and breaking heads already than ladies generally like. So I reserved my news for you, Monsieur le Baron, as you seem to command the garrison, I think."

It is wonderful how soon a Frenchman discovers it, if there be love going on in a house; and it was easy to see, by the gay look which accompanied his words, to what the young officer alluded by my commanding the garrison. Nor did I doubt that, on his return to Rennes, he would carry a full account along with him of all the changes which had taken place in the arrangements of Monsieur de Villardin's family; but as those changes were very satisfactory to myself, of course I did not now much care whether the world were a sharer in my secret or not. Without any comment then on that part of his speech, I accompanied him to take a view of the body of Gaspard de Belleville, and found that as his skull had been terribly fractured by the fall, his death must have been instantaneous. Such being the case, I was not sorry that he had been spared all the horrors

of a public execution, and therefore I had very little to regret in his death. I was sorry, indeed, that I had not obtained from him some explanations in regard to all that had occurred, which he alone could have afforded. A thousand times during the preceding evening I had been upon the point of visiting him in his confinement ; but something had always occurred to prevent my doing so till it was too late ; and, to say the truth, it was not very probable that he would have given me any satisfactory reply in the state of sullen despair into which he had fallen. Nothing, however, was now to be done further than to see the young officer march off his men to Rennes, which he soon after did, carrying with him the two prisoners who remained. They, at their very first interview with the police, were recognised as arrant malefactors ; and at the end of ten days expiated many an enormity, besides that under which we had suffered, by the forfeiture of their lives upon the scaffold.

Once more left in the château with none but its usual inhabitants, I immediately proceeded

to the chamber of Monsieur de Villardin, whom I found infinitely better than I could have expected. He felt that he had been wounded, he said, it was true ; but with the exception of some slight pain and stiffness, he was as well as ever. Laura was with him when I entered ; and, with the permission of the surgeon, we remained at his bedside for nearly an hour.

When we left him we were joined by Father Ferdinand, who, informing me that he was about to send to Dumont for some books, suggested that by the same messenger I should recall my servants and little Clement de la Marke, which was accordingly done. The good priest remained with us till after dinner, and then perhaps feeling that both in Laura's heart and mine there was many a topic of conversation which could not be discussed before any one, he left us to ourselves for the rest of the evening. How that evening passed must be imagined ; for all the happiness, and the dreams, and the rapture, and the mutual questions and explanations that ensued, cannot be described. The cup of joy was never drained more deeply,

and never tasted sweeter, than when, after all the agony we had suffered, we felt ourselves at length assured of happiness, and of each other.

We were again admitted to Monsieur de Villardin for an hour before he went to sleep; and, as he still continued wonderfully well, all apprehensions on his account vanished, and not a drop of bitter mingled with the sweet.

It was late when we parted; and, seeking my own apartments, I was about to give myself up to that more quiet and contemplative enjoyment, which had now succeeded after all the hurried and fluttering rapture of the reciprocation of words of hope and affection with a being so dearly loved, on the termination of all our sorrows and anxieties; but a light tap at my door disturbed me; and, opening it, I beheld Lise, who had spent the greater part of the day in Rennes, appearing now with a face of some anxiety and consternation. When one has suffered much pain and frequent disappointment, it is extraordinary how apprehensive the heart becomes; and I immediately concluded, from the countenance of the soubrette, that

some new misfortune or catastrophe had occurred to mar all our joy.

“Come in, Lise — come in!” I cried. —
“What is the matter? You look frightened!”

“Oh, Monsieur,” she replied, “I am afraid that I have got myself into a terrible scrape!”

Selfishness is certainly inherent in man; and it was, I confess, an infinite relief to me to hear that her anxieties were personal. I desired her, however, as kindly as I could, to tell me what was the matter, promising to do every thing in my power to assist her in her difficulty.

“Oh, that you are bound to do, Monsieur le Baron,” she replied; “for it was all done on your account. But I will tell you all about it. You remember I informed you that I knew of a priest who, for a small sum, would marry you and Mademoiselle privately; but I did not tell you that I went a day or two after and spoke to him all about it, being very sure that you would be obliged to come to a private marriage at last — which you would, too, if it had not been for all this affair. However, as I was saying, I went and told him all about it, as

we were walking along under the Thabor, thinking that nobody on earth was there but ourselves; and just as we had done, and he had promised to do all that I wanted, up got a man from amongst the trees and walked away over the mount. Well, we did not heed him particularly, but he must have overheard all we said; for this morning, when I went down to Rennes, I saw the priest, whose name I will not mention, and who made such an outcry against me, saying that I had been his ruin. When I asked what was the matter, he told me that early yesterday morning a man came to him saying, that Mademoiselle Lise, of the château at the Prés Vallée, had sent him to say, that the young lady and gentleman who were to be married, did not dare to venture into Rennes; but that if he would follow to the old chapel in the forest, which was regularly consecrated, they would meet him there, and that he should have two thousand livres for his pains. Although he thought it somewhat strange altogether, yet the two thousand livres tempted him, and he went; but when he came

there he found himself in the hands of the robbers, and all that horrible business took place, of which Mademoiselle gave me such a dreadful account last night."

"So, so!" I said. "So this was the priest, was it, *ma bonne Lise*! Well, all I can tell you in regard to him is, that he seemed to have neither fear nor reluctance in obeying all that the villains told him to do; and sincerely do I think he deserves most exemplary punishment for his pains."

"Ah, but *Monsieur*!" cried Lise, "you cannot punish him without punishing me too; for, as sure as we are all alive, he will tell every thing that I proposed to him to do, if the other matter is found out; and then, you know, the Duke will send me away from Mademoiselle; and then I shall die of grief and vexation; and all because I wished to help you and my young lady in your love."

Although I felt perfectly sure that Lise's acquaintance, the priest, was as great a villain as any of the robbers in whose hands I had found him, and doubted not that the great part of their information had come from him, yet I

thought it much better, to let the matter sleep, than, by taking any measures to punish him, to make a general exposé of all that had occurred during the last two or three months at the Prés Vallée, which, though innocent enough on all parts, and certainly not discreditable to any one for whom my affections were deeply engaged, would be far better confined, as far as possible, to our own household, without being blazed forth to the rude evil-reporting world. For poor Lise, too—although she had certainly acted sillily—I could not of course help feeling a regard, as one of those whom she intended to benefit by the very act which was now likely to prove of detriment to herself; and I hastened to relieve her mind by assuring her that I would not only take no measures to bring the offences of the priest to light, but would do all in my power to prevent any farther investigation of the affair.

“It will be better for him,” I added, speaking of the priest—“it will be better for him, however, to betake himself to some other part of the country for a time, as Monsieur de Vil-

lardin and a number of the servants must have seen him, and may recognise him in the city the first time we chance to visit it. Give him that advice, therefore, my good Lise, and tell him, that in case he wants a few livres to enable him to change his cure for the time, they shall be furnished to him forthwith, on the understanding that he is to quit Rennes."

Lise's heart overflowed with gratitude and satisfaction; and, promising to communicate all my directions to the priest, and undertaking that he should obey them implicitly, she left me with a mind relieved. Nor did I, indeed, anticipate much chance of the priest being discovered and punished; for I am sorry to say that such offences, especially in Brittany, were at that time suffered to pass with very singular impunity.

I was an earlier riser on the following day than I had been on that morning; and day-break found me up and in the ante-room of Monsieur de Villardin. The truth was, that the excitement of my mind was no longer counterbalanced by the fatigue of my body, and,

consequently, I slept little all night, though the reveries that visited my couch were certainly as sweet as any that ever blessed the heart of man. I was somewhat anxious about Monsieur de Villardin too, as the surgeon had told me that in case of any danger supervening from his wound, it was likely to show itself during that night. The Duke, however, was asleep when I entered ; and, though the surgeon who had sat up with him informed me that some slight fever had appeared, he added, that it was nothing more than the inevitable consequences of the injury he had received, and that the slumber which followed was an indubitable sign that no evil was to be anticipated. I remained in the Duke's apartments till he woke, which did not take place for several hours, and I then found him refreshed and easy, so that all apprehension was at an end.

In the evening my servants and Clement de la Marke arrived from Dumont ; and the boy petitioned so earnestly to see Monsieur de Villardin, that Father Ferdinand, with the consent of the surgeon, permitted him to do so.

Monsieur de Villardin's convalescence was progressive and rapid. Every cloud seemed wafted away from our fate; every tear seemed wiped away from our eyes; and nothing but the smile of joy or the sunshine of happiness was seen within the château, so lately the abode of misery and apprehension. At the end of a few days, Monsieur de Villardin was suffered to rise; at the end of a few more, he was permitted to come down for some hours each day; and, ere a fortnight was over, he was walking up and down the terrace, leaning upon my arm, more from weakness induced by the treatment he had undergone in order to prevent inflammation and fever, than from the actual consequences of his wound.

Our old habits were soon resumed; and it added not a little to my happiness to see the evident pleasure with which Monsieur de Villardin beheld the undisguised affection of his daughter and myself. Often, indeed, he would speak of it to me in terms of the highest satisfaction; and again and again he assured me, as he had done before, that if he had entertained

a thought that our hearts were so deeply bound to each other, he would never, on any account, have promised Laura's hand to another.

“As soon,” he said, when conversing with me one day upon our present circumstances, and our future prospects — “as soon as it be possible, I will put the last seal to your union. I look upon it, indeed, as an atonement I owe you both for not having seen your mutual affection, as I might well have done, and for all that I was obliged to make you suffer in consequence of my own blindness. We must, however, in the first instance, suffer the memory of this other business to die away in some slight degree, especially as you well know that it is, in this country, necessary to obtain the consent of his majesty in the first place. I feel sure, indeed, that both your services and mine will plead too strongly in our favour for any difficulty to occur in our obtaining the royal approbation, which is seldom, if ever, refused where no obstacle is raised on the part of the parents. But still, under all circumstances, I should much wish you to serve through another

campaign, in the course of which I doubt not that you will establish new and powerful claims upon the throne."

"I do not know, monseigneur," I replied, laughing; "but one thing I feel very sure of, which is, that, with all the inducements I now have to love life, and the things that it contains, I shall be certainly much more careful of my own person than I used to be in days of old."

"That will be no disadvantage, De Juvigny," replied Monsieur de Villardin, almost gravely. "You were always too careless of your own person; and, in the last campaign, rash to a vice. To observe it in you was a matter of pain and surprise to me, till I discovered your love for Laura; and then, though fully appreciating the generous feelings which made you prefer death rather than wrong me in the least point, yet I was sorry to find that you should think any circumstances sufficient to justify a man in seeking to terminate his own existence. Do you think, De Juvigny, that I have not had

cause sufficient to snatch at death, if ever man ought to do it? Do you think that I have not had temptations to self-destruction, had I not felt that such an act is base and cowardly, as well as absurd?"

"I do not deny, my Lord," I replied, "that some feelings, such as you suppose, might influence me at first, after discovering what was the state of my own heart towards Mademoiselle de Villardin. But I soon saw the folly of yielding to them; and I can assure you, upon my honour, that if, during the rest of the campaign, I exposed myself unnecessarily, it was done unconsciously."

"I am glad to hear it, DeJuvigny; I am glad to hear it," replied Monsieur de Villardin; "for it was certainly the greatest fault I ever saw you commit. However, when you join the army again, be as careful of your own person as it is in your nature to be; and remember, that if you fall, Laura loses a husband, and I lose a son. There are few men," he added, smiling, "to whom one would willingly address such cautions in sending them forth to battle."

But I know that it would be difficult to put too many checks upon you."

Although I certainly did not anticipate any farther impediment to my happiness, yet it was very natural that I should desire to call Laura my wife before I again joined the army. Nor did I fail to let Monsieur de Villardin know that such was the case; but he, of course, preferred his plan to mine, and I was obliged to yield with a good grace. At the time that this conversation took place, which was about three weeks after my return from Dumont, there still remained full two, if not three, months, ere I was likely again to be called to the field; and as one probably makes up one's mind to that which is remote more easily than to that which is near at hand, Laura and myself did not suffer the prospect of being once more separated before our union, to disturb our happiness in the mean time.

There was only one thing, however, which gave me uneasiness, which was, to observe that, although the surgeons had declared Monsieur de Villardin to be well, and had consequently

taken their leave, yet that he himself did not seem to think his recovery so perfect as they did. The ball was still lodged in his body, the surgeons declaring that it had formed itself a bed under the shoulder bone, whence it could not be extracted, and where it could occasion neither inconvenience nor injury; but still Monsieur de Villardin complained of occasional pain, and I remarked that, in the morning, he was more than commonly gloomy and depressed, while every evening his spirits rose to a much higher pitch than had been usual with him for many years, and a bright flush took possession of his cheek, very different from its usual colour.

All this made me uneasy; and I saw that he himself was not satisfied with his own situation, often talking of going to some of those places in the Pyrenees, the waters of which are famous for the cure of gunshot wounds. I did all that I could to encourage this idea, and also to amuse and occupy his mind in the morning when he seemed most depressed. But it was in vain that I made the latter attempt; he

seemed to love solitude, and to be somewhat impatient of interruption or society. The autumn proved a very rainy one ; and, when he was not able to go out, he passed the greater part of the time in his library, busily occupied in writing and arranging his papers and affairs. From the rapid and accurate manner in which he prepared for the future, one would have supposed that he anticipated a very speedy termination of his life, and yet his conversation did not show that to be the case. He spoke of many years to come, and laid out long plans for after life : but yet, when forced to stay at home, he busied himself with every thing that could imply the speedy approach of death.

When the weather was fine his occupations were very different. He would saunter slowly out for hours, sometimes accompanied by Father Ferdinand, but more frequently alone ; and indeed, as I have before said, he did not seem to covet any society. At night he sat with Laura and myself till we separated for the evening ; and I never, even when first I knew him, beheld him so bright, so cheerful, as he

appeared on these occasions, during nearly ten days after his wound was healed.

At length one night he expressed his determination of going to Barège, as soon as the season permitted; and laid out a plan by which I might accompany him and Laura thither, even if an early commencement of the campaign prevented me from remaining with them all the time of their stay. The whole arrangement seemed to please him, and he retired to rest, in high spirits, at about ten o'clock. The next morning he came down sad and gloomy; and, after breakfast, ordered his hat and cloak to be brought in, scarcely interchanging a word with any one. A glance from Laura's eye made me offer to accompany him on his walk, but he replied decidedly, though in a kindly tone; "No, I thank you, my dear boy; I would rather be alone. It is a fine day, however, for the time of year, and you and Laura had better ride or walk out together." Thus saying, he left us; and about an hour afterwards Laura and myself—followed by Lise, and with Clement de la Marke hovering round

us, like a scared lapwing, now hanging close to my side, now walking on at a great distance, and affecting, with boyish playfulness, not to intrude on the conversation of the lovers — set out to take advantage of the short sunshine of that season.

Had not the tone of Monsieur de Villardin been so very decided in regard to his wish for solitude, we might have endeavoured to meet him on his walk ; but now we felt that it was necessary rather to choose some path which he was not likely to take. As Laura left it to me to determine, I proposed that we should go to the spot which had been our place of meeting when regret, and sorrow, and expectation of speedy separation, served sadly to allay the brief joy of being in each other's society for a time. We had not been there since the whole had been reversed ; and as our fears for the future had then served to deaden the enjoyments of the present, the remembrances of the past now tended only to enhance, in the highest degree, all the delight of the moment, and the anticipa-

tion of bright joys in the time to come. Every thing that we saw as we walked along recalled some idea of painful separations now to take place no more — of dreams constantly dispelled by the consciousness that they were but dreams — of happiness turned into misery, by the certainty that it must end — of wishes that had become pangs, from the expectation of their disappointment. But now the recollection of such things in the past added, as I have said, a zest to all the joy of our hearts ; and it would be necessary to know, or rather to feel, how deeply two hearts can be attached to each other, before any one can conceive how bright — how glorious — how dream-like was the happiness that we then experienced !

Thus we wandered on from meadow to meadow, and from grove to grove, till at length the scene of our meetings, the tall gigantic trees, the soft green turf, the small rise in the ground, connected in my mind with so many various memories, presented themselves to our eyes, still beautiful and soft, though any leaves that lingered on the trees were withered, and the

grey hue of approaching winter was over all the scene.

A few steps taken forward, however, showed me something lying in a heap, as it were, upon the very grave of the Count de Mesnil; and a sudden sinking of my heart took place, with feelings of apprehension that I could not well explain. The same sight had caught the eyes of Laura also; and, pointing forward, she exclaimed, "What is that?" As she did so, she paused for a single instant, but at that moment fear seemed to become prophetic in her bosom. Where we stood it was certainly impossible for her to discern even the form of a human being; but exclaiming, "Good God! it is my father!" she drew her arm from mine, and darted on with the speed of light.

I followed as quick as possible; but ere I overtook her she reached the foot of the tree, and, with a shriek of horror, dropped down as if she had been shot. There was, indeed, sufficient cause: for there, stretched upon the very grave in which his hand and mine had laid

his adversary, with his hat fallen off on one side, and his outstretched hand clasping a rosary, appeared the inanimate form of Monsieur de Villardin, with an immense quantity of blood which had flowed from his mouth and nostrils, deluging the turf on every side, and dabbling his mantle and his left arm, which was stretched upon the ground.

The great loss of blood, the position in which he had fallen, the rigidity of his form when I endeavoured to raise him, all showed me that he, who, for so many years, had been my friend, and more than my father — with whom I had gone through such scenes of interest — who had showed me such undeviating and disinterested affection, — was no more a being of this earth. I never felt mortality more bitterly; but on him all care was vain, and my attention — as well as that of Lise and the page — was directed towards his unhappy child, whose temporary loss of feeling and reflection was, perhaps, the best thing that could happen to her at the time. I bore her in my arms to one of the woodman's cottages at about half a mile distance, sending

the boy back with all speed to the château for aid and assistance.

All the inhabitants of the building were soon poured forth; the body of Monsieur de Villardin was removed to the castle; and the carriage having been procured, poor Laura was carried back to her own apartments, falling from one fainting fit into another, with intervals only sufficient to recall the horrible sight she had beheld, ere she was again lost in unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XI.

I LEFT Laura in the hands of her women ; and despatching a messenger for medical aid from Rennes, turned, with a heavy heart, to the library, in which the body of the Duke had been placed. The room was crowded with servants, gathered together in a semi-circle at the end nearest the door, and gazing forward towards the corpse, while a feeling of reverence and awe kept them from approaching farther, as Father Ferdinand, with a degree of emotion which I had never before beheld in him, stood near the head of his dead friend and wept aloud. Clement de la Marke had crept close up, and wept also ; and passing on I, too, gazed upon the countenance which had beamed so many kind things upon me, and I joined my tears to theirs.

It was a sad and sorrowful sight ; and in grief and deep mourning passed over that day, and many that succeeded. Messengers were sent

round all the country to every relation and friend of the deceased nobleman; and as there was no necessity for immediate interment, the funeral was delayed till the old Count de Lorris could arrive, as it was believed that to him had been assigned the temporary guardianship of Mademoiselle de Villardin, and the execution of the will of the deceased. Every direction was given, and every measure taken by Father Ferdinand, who seemed to feel himself fully justified, by his long friendship with Monsieur de Villardin, to take the command of all, till such time as his own will could be ascertained. Laura was, of course, incompetent to make any of the painful arrangements herself; and to me and Father Ferdinand she seemed to cling with redoubled affection, from the bereavement which she had just undergone. During the ten days which the funeral was delayed, the body of Monsieur de Villardin was embalmed; and in the course of that operation, it was discovered that the ball which he had received in the forest had lodged close upon one of the large blood vessels of the chest, and although it had not

wounded the artery at the time, yet that it had created a degree of inflammation round it, which had gradually worn it away, so that probably the great emotion to which Monsieur de Villardin had subjected himself, in visiting, for the first time, the scene of the Count de Mesnil's death, had caused a rupture of the vessel, which might not otherwise have taken place for months.

At length Monsieur de Lorris arrived; the friends and relations of the deceased nobleman were all assembled; and the funeral took place. I shall not pause on so sad a ceremony, which was, perhaps, more painful to my feelings, from the careless indifference of the many who attended it, contrasting with the grief of my own heart. As soon as it was over, the notaries opened the seals which had been placed upon all the papers of Monsieur de Villardin; and as Laura had refused to be present, Monsieur de Lorris, on her part, received the large packet of freshly written papers, to which the notary, who had been so constantly with the Duke for some weeks, guided us at once. The first

thing that appeared was the will of the deceased nobleman, which had been drawn up a few days before his death; and which, though it gave great dissatisfaction to his two nearest cousins, was exactly such as those who knew him best might have anticipated. He appointed three guardians to his daughter — Father Ferdinand, the Count de Lorris, and myself, at the same time expressing, in the strongest manner, his will that she should become my wife as soon as a decent space of mourning for his loss was over. He here, too, pointed out what had been evident before, that he felt his life would not be of long duration; and he stated precisely that it was his intention to see me united to his daughter, if he lived long enough; in which case, of course, that will was to be considered as null and void. He then went on to dispose of his property, leaving all his hereditary estates, which, as well as those of his wife, naturally descended to his daughter, to follow the legal course; but from the wealth which, in the retired life he had generally led, he had accumulated to a very great extent, and from

the lands he had purchased, he made many bequests. All his old servants were amply provided for; a number of charities and religious institutions were remembered with great liberality; a year's rent was remitted to all his tenants; and stating it to be a personal mark of his affection and gratitude towards me, for many benefits that he could never sufficiently repay, he left me all the rest of his purchased lands, forming, together, a fortune superior to that of many of the first nobles in France. — His relations in general, with whom, as I have before stated, he lived in terms of no great affection, were not even mentioned; and I could see many a heavy brow knit upon me, with passions which might have found a louder tongue, had it not been well known that I was not one to pass over insult or injury in silence. The same persons who had been appointed guardians to Mademoiselle de Villardin were required to see the will put in execution; and to them were added Monsieur de Vins, the governor of the province of Brittany, to whom a handsome legacy had also been assigned.

The two nearest relatives of the late Duke, after listening attentively to the document, which was read by the notary, declared their intention of endeavouring to set aside, at least, that part of it which appointed strangers to be the guardians of the young heiress, citing the custom of Brittany, which bestowed that office upon the nearest of kin. But the notary, with a smile, pointed out that Monsieur de Villardin had been fully aware of that fact, and had taken the means provided by the law for effectually barring their claim; and read at the same time a note appended to the will, in which the Duke formally declared, that he had considered their title to the guardianship; and, after mature deliberation, had rejected it, believing them to be unfitted for it by their views of private interest. Mortified, disappointed, and affecting great indignation, they quitted the room, and sought their horses, while the notary proceeded to lay before us the other papers. Of these, several were addressed to Monsieur de Lorris, several to Father Ferdinand, and several to myself. Amongst the last, I found a letter to the

King himself, and in the envelope a desire expressed that I would send it to Paris immediately, and afterwards would deliver, in person, to his majesty the baton of field marshal which Monsieur de Villardin had so lately received.

As all the other papers found were of a private nature, we now left the library; and, having eaten and drank as if they came on a festive rather than a mournful occasion, those who had been called to the funeral dropped away one by one, and the house resumed its calm and gloomy solitude. As yet I had scarcely had time to speak with Monsieur de Lorris; but I now found the worthy old man as full of affection and regard for me as when last we met. He was overjoyed, he said, that Monsieur de Villardin had fixed upon one as a husband for his daughter, who had already shown that he was capable of protecting her in any circumstances of difficulty or danger. He asked a number of questions, however, concerning my family; and although, to avoid hurting my feelings, he did so under the semblance of taking an interest in my history and

affairs, yet I could see that the good Count was anxious to assure himself that the heiress of the houses of De Villardin and Lorris was not about to make a *mésalliance*. I answered him frankly and candidly, and I was happy to find that my replies gave him every sort of satisfaction. The Earl of Norwich, he said, of whom I had spoken, was then in France; and, he doubted not, would be happy to see the son of his old friend.

I was not a little delighted to find that he was so, as it gave me the means of confirming, at once, to any one interested, all the facts which I have related connected with my early history. While my conversation took place with the old Count, Father Ferdinand had retired to his own apartments: and, when I had explained to Monsieur de Lorris every thing concerning myself, and a number of other events connected with Monsieur de Villardin, we sent up to enquire after Laura's health, and whether we might be permitted to wait upon her. She replied, however, that she felt too unwell to see even her dearest friends at that moment;

but that she hoped to have recovered sufficient composure, by the following morning, to receive us both.

The rest of the evening was principally spent in my own apartments, looking over the papers which Monsieur de Villardin had left addressed to myself; and certainly all the signs of strong affection and regard, which I found in every line, tended to make me feel more deeply than ever the loss I had sustained. The papers consisted chiefly of kind admonitions and advice concerning my own conduct in the high station of life, which I should be called to fill in France after my marriage with his daughter, and of directions as to the manner of obtaining most easily the King's signature to our marriage contract. Amongst others, he gave me a copy of the letter which he had himself written to his majesty, and which made it his last and dying request, that the monarch would confirm the arrangements he had made. He also informed the King that he had desired me to write to his majesty immediately, requesting his consent, in order that Mademoiselle de Villardin might

not be longer than necessary without that degree of protection which none but a husband or a father could afford.

Such manifold proofs of confidence, and such minute care for my happiness and welfare, were far more gratifying to my heart than the splendid fortune he had left me, or indeed than any thing he could bestow, except the hand of that dear girl whose heart already was my own. It was late at night before the reading of all these papers, and the reflections to which they gave rise, came to an end; and towards two o'clock I retired to bed, resolving to consult Monsieur de Lorris and Father Ferdinand the next morning, concerning the terms in which I was to address the King, a matter wherewith I was very little acquainted. The next morning, however, I was up early; and, as I was descending towards the saloon, I was way-laid by Lise, who informed me that her mistress was anxious to see me, for the first time after her father's funeral, without any other persons being present; and feeling, equally with herself, how much better it was that it should be so, I gladly

followed to the little boudoir attached to her apartment.

She was sitting watching for my coming, with her feelings still highly excited; and the moment she saw me she rose, threw herself into my arms, and wept long and bitterly. It was as if she had said, "I have none but you now upon the earth. Forgive me if I mourn for those that are gone." When the first burst of tears was over, she spoke more calmly, and, in a long and interesting, though often painful, conversation, frequently interrupted by tears, she suffered me to recapitulate to her all that had been done, and to tell her exactly the state in which she stood. In the end, as it was necessary that she should make an effort to resume her usual occupations, she suffered me to lead her down to the saloon; and, though every now and then some object, or some association, would agitate her for a time, our conversation was here renewed, and proceeded more tranquilly till, in about half an hour after, we were joined by Father Ferdinand and the Count de Lorris. Laura received them with less painful

emotions than I had expected; and the day passed over sadly, indeed, and gloomily, but calmly upon the whole. When informed of the nature of her father's letter to the King, she wished much that it should be delayed for a day or two; but when it was explained to her that to do so might give high offence, she yielded at once; and in the evening I applied to Monsieur de Lorris and Father Ferdinand for directions as to the form and manner in which I was to couch my application to the King.

“ My dear young friend,” replied Monsieur de Lorris, “ I never was happy enough to be married myself, and consequently cannot exactly tell you what are the precise terms you should use in requesting the King's consent to your union with my niece.”

“ I think I can direct you, my son,” replied Father Ferdinand, “ though I have never been married either;” and, taking up the pen, he wrote down the copy of a formal letter to the King, with as much ease and accuracy as if he had been accustomed, throughout his life, to the

etiquette and ceremonial of courts, rather than to the shade of the cloister and the retirement of the country. After referring to the directions which I had received from Monsieur de Villardin to that effect, he begged to know when I might be permitted to lay at his Majesty's feet the baton of field-marshal, which I was charged to deliver; and, in requesting the signature of his Majesty to my marriage contract with Mademoiselle de Villardin, it was obvious that, though he avoided every thing which might look like presumption, yet he took care not to assume that the King would at all hesitate to grant my request.

With many thanks, I copied the paper exactly, and the next morning it was despatched to Paris by a special messenger. The old Count de Lorris, who was kindness itself, agreed to remain with us till after my marriage with Laura had taken place; and, as it was naturally concluded that it would be more agreeable to me to remain at the Près Vallée with my future bride, Father Ferdinand undertook to make all the arrangements at Dumont, rendered neces-

sary by M. de Villardin's decease ; and he set off the following morning, accompanied by Clement de la Marke, whose eagerness for every change of scene and place put me not a little in mind of my own younger days. — Laura's grief for the loss of her father abated but slowly ; yet still, as ever with the human heart, the calm hand of time was continually taking something from the poignancy of her first affliction. We passed almost the whole of our hours in each other's society ; and, though softened by our mutual sorrow for the dead, those hours still remain among the bright things on which memory can rest so sweetly, and which she preserves for after years, as a store of treasured enjoyments for the wintry season of our age.

Of course we felt some anxiety for the return of our messenger from Paris ; for though we never anticipated for a moment that the King would make any opposition to our marriage, sanctioned as it had been by Monsieur de Villardin himself, yet, when that which we ardently desire is shadowed by even the smallest doubt, the heart can never rest satisfied till

certainty is substituted in the place of hope. At the end of eight days Father Ferdinand returned from Dumont; and two or three days more passed in hourly expectation of our messenger's appearance. We were well aware that common couriers, unless on some very extraordinary occasion, always take their time upon the road; but when another day passed, and another, and a whole fortnight elapsed without my receiving any answer to my application, we all became uneasy, and I even thought of setting off myself to Paris, to ascertain the cause of the delay. At length, late one evening, the messenger was ushered in, just as we were about to proceed to the supper-room. He instantly presented to me a packet; and, without ceremony, I cut the silk and opened it, when, within the envelope, I found a paper containing the following words, as the only reply which the King had vouchsafed to my request:—

“ DE PAR LE ROY.

“ Il est ordonné au Sieur Baron de Juvigny, Colonel du ——— régiment actuellement en

Bretagne, de se rendre à la ville de Senlis pour y joindre son régiment. Fait à Fontainebleau, le 9 Février, 1658.

“ LOUIS.”

The paper dropped from my hand, and I believe that I turned deadly pale; for Laura, whose eyes were fixed upon me as I read, clasped her hands, exclaiming, “Good God! De Juvigny, what is the matter?” Father Ferdinand raised the paper, and, giving the messenger a sign to withdraw, read it aloud, while we all gazed upon each other in no small grief and consternation. The good Father’s brow contracted strongly, and he said, “This is, indeed, unfavourable, — I might almost add, ungrateful, after all that has been done in the royal cause, at moments of its greatest need, by the two men whose best designs and dearest wishes the King appears inclined to thwart.”

“It can only be,” said Monsieur de Lorris, “that that foreign minion, Mazarine, knowing that our dear girl here is one of the greatest heiresses in France, designs to give her to some

of his own creatures ; but I will apply to the King myself ; and fear not, my dear De Juvigny, for I will leave no means untried to obtain what we all desire, and I promise you, as a man of honour and a French nobleman, never to consent to her marriage with any person but yourself."

" I promise you the same, my son," added Father Ferdinand ; " and, though it is long since I have set my foot in Paris, and I had hoped never to do so again, yet I will journey thither, and will make my voice heard in a manner which I do not think can be disregarded. Laura, too, must be firm ; but I know that she will be so," he added. " Her father's will, her own affection, her positive promise, all bind her to you, De Juvigny, morally and religiously, as much as if she were your wife ; and I solemnly declare not only that she ought not, but that she cannot, marry any other person."

" Never," said Laura, firmly, " never. Give me a pen and ink, De Juvigny. Let me make it irrevocable, that I may always have an answer ready to any one who may press me on

the subject ;” and, sitting down to a table, she wrote, with a rapid and somewhat trembling hand, a far more forcible renewal of the promise which was implied in the paper which had been given me by her father.

I had remained in silence, and almost stupefied, while all this took place : but I now laid down the order to join my regiment on the table, saying, “ I will immediately resign my command in his Majesty’s service. I know that Laura cares not for splendour or station, and I will request her to become mine, before any one can separate us. All that the utmost tyranny can do is to deprive her of those estates, which others value more than we do ; and we have enough, without them, to render us happy and independent, in whatever land we may choose to make our home.”

“ No, no, De Juvigny,” cried Father Ferdinand ; “ you are too hasty, my son. As yet we cannot at all tell what are the real intentions of his Majesty ; and well might he feel himself offended and insulted by such want of confidence in his justice, and such precipitate haste. When the

will of our late friend is laid before him — when the solicitations of Monsieur de Lorris, and all whom he can interest, have been heard — when a number of peculiar circumstances, which I have to relate, are made known to the royal ear — there can be very little doubt that his Majesty will yield his consent ; and even should he not, if you are inclined to take Laura portionless, it will always be in your power to do so, after having shown a noble obedience to the commands of the King, and a due estimation of the duty of a soldier. Perhaps it may be his Majesty's design merely to try you ; and, in that case, I would not for the world you should be found deficient, after having distinguished yourself so honourably already in his service. No, no. Take my advice. Obey at once ; and, depend upon it, such conduct will meet its reward."

I felt convinced in my heart that the line of conduct which Father Ferdinand suggested was that which my duty called upon me to pursue : but passion, of course, led me a contrary way ; and I still urged my own plan, arguing that

means might be taken to prevent my ever seeing Laura again. This, however, they showed me was impossible ; and Monsieur de Lorris joined his arguments strongly to those of Father Ferdinand. I found, too, that Laura herself had an invincible repugnance to wedding any one so soon after her father's death, as the scheme which I proposed implied. I was obliged to abandon it, then, and nothing remained but to obey immediately the order I had received, without even hesitation or remonstrance. — Father Ferdinand and Monsieur de Lorris promised to set out for Paris as soon as possible, and seemed so confident of being able to effect the object that they sought, that they restored some degree of hope to my heart, which had almost been given up to despair, when I first beheld what the packet had contained.

One day was needed for preparation : but, when once my determination was fixed, I felt that the sooner it was executed the better ; and, on the second morning after receiving the royal commands, taking leave of all that I

loved on earth, with pain and apprehension, on which I shall not dwell, I mounted my horse, and, followed by my little train, rode off to join my regiment at Senlis.

CHAPTER XII.

ON arriving at Senlis it became sufficiently evident, from the state of inactivity in which I was left, that the object of the King, or rather of his minister, was solely to remove me from the neighbourhood of Mademoiselle de Villardin ; and that no real necessity existed for my presence with a regiment quartered at a distance from any danger, and employed in no service whatever. Although the rash despair to which I had formerly yielded had now quitted my mind, I trust, for ever, yet I fell into a state of deep despondency, from which I was only roused for a moment on those days when I received one of the frequent letters with which Laura endeavoured to console me. From Father Ferdinand and the Count de Lorris I heard less frequently, and their letters, certainly, gave me less food for hope than those of Laura. They had left the Près Vallée about ten days

after I myself had quitted it, and had proceeded to Paris to petition the King in person. As it was judged expedient to secure some female companion for the young heiress during the absence of all her guardians, one of the nuns of St. Ursula, having obtained a dispensation to that effect, remained with Laura at the Près Vallée; but, as she exercised no control over her actions, this arrangement did not at all interrupt our constant communication. The journey of Father Ferdinand and the Count, however, produced no very rapid effects. Several weeks passed before they could obtain a private audience; and when, at length, it was granted, the only reply they received was, that the King acknowledged my services, and would consider my claims.

It appeared to me that no great consideration was wanting; but while this intentional delay continued, the month of May ushered in our military operations. The King put himself at the head of the army destined to cover the frontier; and Turenne led a small force, of which my regiment formed a part, to the siege

of Dunkirk. I will not pause upon the details of a campaign which, having taken place so lately, is too well known to need any relation. My own conduct during the year that followed was, of course, greatly affected by the circumstances in which I stood. Although I did not forget the exhortations to prudence which I had received from Monsieur de Villardin, yet it was not in my nature to calculate personal dangers; and the eagerness which I now felt, by important services, to shame down all opposition to my just claims, quickened every faculty, and made me lose no opportunity. As I knew, however, that the eye of the bravest, but most cautious, general of the age was upon me, I endeavoured, as far as possible, to guard against even the appearance of imprudence; and, luckily, I was in this, at least, quite successful. Knowing that in the siege a cavalry regiment would probably have but little opportunity of distinguishing itself, I endeavoured, in our march upon Dunkirk, to find those occasions for service which I might afterwards be deprived of; and as the enemies' preparations

were rapid and energetic, I was tolerably successful. The greatest service which I was thus enabled to render was at the passage of the Lys. Having been thrown forward to reconnoitre, I came suddenly upon a redoubt of the enemy, placed to defend the very passage upon which the army was marching. I was suffered to approach so near without being noticed, that I thought I might as well push on ; and, dismounting one of the troops, I was in possession of the place, to my own surprise, as well as that of the Spaniards, before they knew any thing of our approach.

But two men were lost in the momentary struggle which took place in the redoubt ; and instantly sending news to the Marshal of our unexpected success, I had the satisfaction of seeing the army pass the river without the slightest opposition. At night I was called to the quarters of Monsieur de Turenne, with whom I had a long private interview, in which I explained to him my precise situation, and told him the great incentive to exertion which was now before me.

“ Well, well, my son,” he said, in a kindly tone, as I took my leave ; “ well, well, I will do my best for you ; and fear not that your services shall have a fair report at court.”

This promise with some men might not have implied much, but it was Turenne who spoke, and the words did not convey one half of his intentions in my favour. The siege of Dunkirk succeeded ; and no day passed without my being furnished with some means of obtaining honour and applause. I endeavoured to deserve such kindness ; and whether employed in covering the foraging parties, or in the more laborious and less glorious occupation of bringing fascines, I tried, by activity, perseverance, and care, to distinguish myself from others to whom the same services were assigned. At length the Spanish army, commanded by the Prince de Condé, advanced to the succour of Dunkirk, and the famous battle of the Sand Hills took place. Under the command of the Marquis of Castelnau, my regiment formed part of the left wing, which, marching along the river, turned the enemies’ flank ; and I had here every op-

portunity of displaying whatever military qualities I might possess. My men seconded me most gallantly ; and the Marquis de Castelnau being severely wounded, the command of the two thousand seven hundred men, of which alone that division was composed, fell upon me for the time.

Turenne himself thanked me the next morning, at the head of my regiment, for the services I had rendered ; and Dunkirk having surrendered shortly after, I heard, with no small satisfaction, that the young king himself, with all his court, was about to visit the camp. Unfortunately the smallness of our force, and the great want of cavalry, caused the regiments of horse to be in continual requisition ; and two days before the arrival of the King, I was detached towards Bergues, in order, as far as possible, to prevent the enemy from taking measures to retard our progress in the siege of that town, which was now determined. I saw that Turenne was grieved when he gave the order ; but, of course, he could suffer no pri-

vate consideration to interfere with the service of the King.

Bergues was soon taken, and a number of other places followed, the most important of which was Gravelines. At length the siege of Ypres was determined; but ere the trenches were opened an event occurred which prevented my witnessing the rest of the campaign. In the course of our march upon Menin, a report reached head-quarters, that the Prince de Lignes, with a small force, was posted at the distance of a league and a half, and Turenne immediately detached the Comte de Roye in order to dislodge the enemy. My regiment formed part of the force under that officer's command; and the position of the Prince de Lignes was soon forced, his infantry nearly cut to pieces, and his cavalry in full retreat. The pursuit was intrusted to myself, and I followed the enemy almost to the gates of Ypres. There, however, they rallied, made a gallant charge, and, in the *mêlée*, I received a severe cut on the head, which passed through my helmet and even wounded the skull. I was under the

horse's feet in an instant, but, luckily, I received no further injury ; and when I recovered from the stunning effect of the blow, I found myself a prisoner in the town of Ypres.

Surgeons were busy dressing my wounds, and one or two officers of some rank were standing round the table on which I had been laid. As I opened my eyes, one of the lookers on bade another tell the Prince ; and in a moment after the Prince de Lignes was standing by my side. After asking the surgeon whether he might speak with me, with due regard to my safety, and hearing his opinion that I was not seriously injured, he addressed me by my name.

“ Monsieur de Juvigny,” he said, “ we are happy in having taken an officer of your merit and distinction, as, probably, you can give us some information which the other prisoners are either not able or not willing to afford. What we wish to know is, whether Monsieur de Turenne does or does not really intend to sit down before this place ?”

I felt some difficulty in articulating ; but I

replied, as well as I could, “ You must be aware, sir, that it is my duty to refuse answers to all such questions.”

“ Certainly,” he rejoined, “ if by so doing you contributed to put us on our guard, or to afford any facility for opposing the enemy; but I give you my honour that we have neither means nor inclination to make any farther preparations than we have done for the defence of the place, and my sole purpose in asking the question is, to send away, out of pure compassion, a number of the poor and needy citizens, who must die of starvation if Monsieur de Turenne attempts to reduce the place by famine; which must be his plan if he have any design against Ypres, as I find he has no battering train with his army. As a good soldier, and a worthy gentleman, you will see at once that every principle of humanity requires me to clear the town of all unnecessary mouths. You yourself, and all the other wounded and prisoners, must be sent off to Brussels at all risks, if such should be the intention of the French

general : so answer me candidly, I entreat you."

" Sir," I replied, " you must judge of what *your* duty requires of *you* — mine is straightforward. If it be the intention of Monsieur de Turenne to starve you out, the more persons you have to feed the better for his purpose ; and although, I confess, I would fain escape being sent to Brussels in my present state, yet I can give you no information."

" I must even send you thither, then," replied the Prince ; and in a brief conversation with the other officers present, I heard him say, " Oh ! depend upon it, if they were not determined to attack the place, he would say so, to avoid the journey."

" No, indeed, Monsieur le Prince !" I exclaimed. " You are mistaken. I would not give you one tittle of intelligence if I knew that Monsieur de Turenne was going to retread his steps to-morrow."

The Prince smiled and left the room ; and after having been tended carefully during the rest of that evening and the following night, I

was put into a carriage early the next morning, and, with a number of other wounded persons, as well as prisoners, and all those who were desirous of quitting the town, was sent on, not indeed to Brussels, but to Tournay.

Fearful that a report of my being killed might reach Laura, I sat up at the first halting place, and — in spite of all remonstrances from a surgeon who accompanied us — wrote a letter to the Près Vallée, assuring her, that though a prisoner, and slightly wounded, I was in no danger. Of this letter the commander of our little escort, a gallant young Spaniard, who spoke French very tolerably, took charge, promising to despatch it to France by the very first opportunity.

Whether it was the heat of the weather, the fatigue of the journey, or, as the surgeon predicted, the exertion of writing which irritated my wound, I cannot tell, but, ere I reached the end of our second day's march, I was in all the raving delirium of a high fever. For nearly three weeks the days passed over my head without leaving any remembrance behind them ;

and when I recovered my senses, I found myself reduced to infant weakness, and lying in a chamber which was evidently not the ward of an hospital, as my last recollections induced me to believe would be the case. It was a small neat room, cool and shady; and I found a nurse constantly by my bedside, while a surgeon visited me three times each day. — At first I was much too feeble to ask any questions; but, on the second or third morning after I began to recover, I begged the nurse to tell me where I was, when, to my surprise, I was told that I was in Tournay, and in the quarters of the Prince de Condé. The next day I was visited by several French officers, who had accompanied his Highness into exile; and when I was well enough to sit up for a short time, the Prince himself condescended to visit me, and remained with me alone for a full hour, making me tell him my whole history. The fate of Monsieur de Villardin, of which he had not yet heard, seemed to grieve him much; and when he left me he said, with one of those frank, brilliant smiles, which sometimes illuminated a

countenance that usually was more striking than prepossessing, “ Well, well, De Juvigny, I will think of what I can do to serve you ; and as hostilities are suspended, and a treaty of peace is under negotiation, I may have it more in my power to show you that I have not forgot *Vincennes*, than I have yet had since we met there.”

I trusted that it might be so, especially as I had candidly told the Prince my situation in regard to Mademoiselle de Villardin, only hoping when I did so, to obtain my liberty more speedily. The news, however, that hostilities were suspended, and that peace was likely to be concluded, gave me the hope of soon holding my beloved Laura to my heart once more, as no pretext for separating us again would then exist. Having now shown my obedience to the monarch I served, and fully done my duty as a soldier, I determined to yield no more ; and resolved, as a last resource, if any attempt should be made to reject my claim to Laura’s hand, to beg her to unite her fate to mine, without the consent of any monarch on the earth, and try our fate in my native land,

where the prospects were now brightened by the death of the usurper.

From that day till I had completely recovered my health, I did not again see the Prince de Condé; and, on enquiring for him when I was well enough to go out, I found that he was absent from Tournay, and not likely to come back for more than a week. These tidings vexed me a good deal, as I was now most anxious to return to France. No opposition, however, was made to my going out into the town, or even beyond the gates; and I found every facility of obtaining money amongst the merchants of the place. Thus I might at any time have effected my escape, had I been so inclined. But although my parole had never been even asked, the kindness which had been shown me by the Prince was a surer bond than links of iron; and I lingered on in Tournay with some degree of fretful impatience, but still gaining additional strength and health every hour. Had I known where to address a letter to his Highness, I certainly would have written to him; but he was moving from place to place,

and even the French officers who remained in Tournay could not give me the necessary information. Thus past nearly four weeks ; and the world again began to assume the aspect of spring. It was now more than a year since I had seen Laura, and fully four months since I had heard from her or from Father Ferdinand ; and there was a sort of dim uncertainty about the events which might have taken place in the interim that made my heart sometimes feel sick with apprehension.

At length, one night when I had returned *home*—as I called my little room in the Prince's quarters—more gloomy than ever, and was sitting by lamp-light, consoling myself in the only way I could devise, by writing to Laura for the third or fourth time since my recovery, I heard a good deal of bustle in the courts, and in about an hour afterwards, I was summoned to attend the Prince de Condé. Overjoyed at his return, I hurried to his presence, and found him quite alone. I believe the gladness of my heart sparkled out upon my countenance ; for though there was a good deal of vexation and

chagrin in his own face, yet he smiled when he saw me.

“ You seem glad of my return, De Juvigny,” he said, “ but I am going to send you away from me directly. When I offered to set you free in Paris, in recompense for former services, or to reserve the consideration of them till another moment and put you to ransom, I did not think I should be so long ere I could do any thing for you. Even now, all I can do is to make a messenger of you. However, the letter with which I am about to charge you may be worth the pains of carrying, if you know how to take advantage of it. The fact is, Spain and France are negotiating. Spain holds out on my account. The whole business annoys me. I fear not to be left to stand or fall by my own strength; and I do not wish to delay the arrangement of peace, so necessary to both countries, for any private interests of my own. I have consequently written this letter to Don Louis de Haro, the minister of his Catholic Majesty, beseeching him to put my personal affairs entirely on one side, while

considering the far more important business of peace. No one more eagerly desires the conclusion of the negotiations than my royal cousin Louis of France; and to him I now send you, begging you to put this letter for Don Louis into the King's own hands, and request him, on my part, to make what use of it he will. The man who brings it to him, De Juvigny," he added, with a gay smile, "may well command the hand of the first heiress in France; and if I obtain for you, by this means, the woman that you love, I shall conceive that I have acquitted myself well towards you."

I need hardly say that my gratitude was deep and sincere, and after expressing it as well as I could, I received the Prince's farther directions; and the next morning mounted a horse I had bought in the city, and, followed by four of the troopers of my own regiment—who had been taken in attempting to rescue me, and whom I had since found in Tournay—I set out for Paris, furnished with all the necessary passports. The poor fellows who accompanied me were delighted to find that the Prince had

agreed to liberate them without exchange ; and I need hardly say, that although I doubted not that difficulties and annoyances were still before me, my heart, too, beat more lightly than it had done for many a day. Thus we lost no time on the road ; and as fast as our beasts would carry us made our way to Paris. It was after nightfall when we arrived, but without pause or hesitation I proceeded direct to the palace, and giving my name and quality to the attendants, I begged them to inform his Majesty and the Cardinal that I had intelligence of the utmost importance to communicate. The Cardinal, one of the pages informed me, had set out for the Spanish frontier some days before ; but my message having been sent through all the proper channels to the King, I received, in reply, an order to present myself the next morning an hour before grand mass.

This was a disappointment ; for I had fully calculated upon the news which I bore procuring me an immediate reception ; but kings are so much accustomed to hear that their subjects have intelligence of importance to communicate,

and to find that it refers to some petty interest or some private suit, that his Majesty fully believed my tidings to refer to my own affairs. The next morning I was at the Tuilleries at the exact moment ; but, much to my annoyance and disgust, I was kept in an antechamber till the bells for mass sounded all over the town, and remained there alone till the service of the church was over. More than a quarter of an hour passed, after I had learned that mass was done, seeing from the windows the people trotting home through the dirty streets, ere an attendant summoned me to the presence of the King. I was too much accustomed to various scenes, and had too frequently looked a sterner monarch in the face, to feel any agitation upon approaching any king upon earth ; but in the interview that was about to take place, dearer interests than life itself were concerned ; and when I thought of Laura my heart certainly beat with a quicker pulse as I moved towards the royal presence.

After passing through several other apartments, the door of a cabinet was thrown open

by the page, and immediately after I found myself before the young king, and in the midst of a circle which clearly showed me that my application for an audience had been supposed to refer to my personal concerns. On the King's right hand stood Monsieur de Turenne, and on his left the secretary Le Tellier. The Queen-mother also was present, together with several ladies, and one or two nuns, whose garb was certainly more harmonious with the cloister than the court; but on the Monarch's left appeared Father Ferdinand, the Count de Lorris, and the ancient friend of both my father and myself, the good old Earl of Norwich. One of Monsieur de Villardin's first cousins was there also, and his presence did not seem to augur well for my suit. A few of the officers of the court made up the group, and as I ran my eye over it in advancing, I was glad to find that the majority of those present were certainly inclined to support my pretensions. As the feelings of the King himself, however, were of far greater importance, I tried to gather from his countenance what was passing in his

heart; and, accustomed as I had been from my early years to scan the faces of my fellow-men, I saw enough to give me some confidence. His brow was strongly contracted, it is true; and he fixed his eye upon me, as I entered, with an air of stern majesty which spoke any thing but favour. At the same time, however, there was the least possible inclination towards a smile lurking about the corner of his mouth; and with this key to the rest, as I knew that I had done nothing to deserve severity, I judged that the stern frown upon his brow was too bitter to be entirely natural.

I advanced and kissed the hand he held out to me, and then drew a step back while he said, “Monsieur le Baron, you have desired an audience; and we are, in some degree, prepared for the business you have to speak of. Explain yourself, therefore, and doubt not that we shall do you justice.”

I again advanced; and, well knowing that to forget the communication of the Prince de Condé, even for a moment, in my own hopes and fears, would be a subject of deep offence

to the King, as well as the very worst policy in my own affairs, I bent my knee, and at once tendered his Highness's letter, saying, "Having had the good fortune, sire, to be wounded and taken prisoner in your ——"

"The good fortune, sir!" exclaimed the King. "Do you call being wounded and imprisoned good fortune?"

"It certainly is so, sire," I answered, "when it is in the service of a prince who rewards all his servants far more than they deserve, and compensates, tenfold, every thing that is suffered in his cause."

The King smiled, and bade me go on. — "Having, then, the good fortune, sire," I continued, "to be wounded and taken prisoner in your Majesty's service, I fell into the power of his Highness the Prince de Condé, who, on setting me at liberty, charged me to deliver into your royal hand this letter, begging that you would be graciously pleased to make what use of it you, in your wisdom, shall think fit, to remove all difficulties from your gracious purpose of restoring peace to Europe."

The Queen-mother half rose from her chair, and Le Tellier took a step forward to receive, according to custom, the paper which I tendered to the King; but Louis took it himself at once, and opening the letter, which was not sealed, read the contents eagerly. "Indeed!" he cried, when he had concluded. "Indeed! Is he so generous? Then we must not suffer him to out-do us in generosity! Monsieur de Juvigny, the bringing us that letter from our noble cousin adds weight to your other services. Read, madam," he added, giving the paper to the Queen-mother; "read, and after having settled this other affair, we will take your Majesty's counsel as to what is to be done."

Anne of Austria read the letter attentively; and as the conclusion of a final peace with Spain was now her first desire, I could see her countenance beam with satisfaction as she saw that the only obstacle to the accomplishment of that wish was removed by the voluntary act of the Prince de Condé. When he had done she gave the letter to the secretary, and at the

same time bent a gracious smile upon me, saying, " You have indeed brought us news, young gentleman, well worthy of honour and reward ! "

The King himself immediately proceeded, again assuming the somewhat stern air with which he had at first received me. " Monsieur le Baron de Juvigny," he said, " you have at different times highly distinguished yourself in our service ; and Monsieur de Turenne here present gives the most favourable report of your military skill and qualities. All services rendered to ourselves we are certainly willing to recompense even more liberally than bare justice might require ; but we understand that you aim at the hand of the first heiress in France — a match for a prince — an alliance which we should not scruple to seek for a member of our own family. This is estimating your claims somewhat too highly."

" Sire ! " I replied, " it is not upon any small services I may have rendered to your Majesty, nor upon my long and undeviating attachment to the royal cause, before genius

and wisdom had swept away the difficulties that surrounded it, nor upon some sufferings which I have endured in the course of my career, that I found my claim to the hand of *Mademoiselle de Villardin*. I found it upon her father's promise and her own; I found it upon her father's will, and upon his express application to your Majesty; and, more than all, I found it upon the deep attachment that exists between us. Both her guardians, one of whom is her nearest relative, consent to our union; and, indeed, they are bound to do so by the will of her father."

"But here, sir," said the King, "is her father's next of kin, who positively objects to her marriage with one, whose birth, for aught we know, may be very inferior."

"I appeal to that English nobleman, sire," I replied, pointing to the Earl of Norwich, "who has known me from my birth, and who will answer for it, that the blood of my father and my mother was as pure as any in the realm of France, however poor we all might have become by the changes of this uncertain world."

“ Ay, there is the fact !” answered Louis. “ Ought I to bestow the hand of this great heiress upon one who may have much merit and even noble blood, but who sought these shores an absolute adventurer ?”

The colour mounted into my face ; and, although I had hitherto been as cautious as possible, some of my ancient abruptness broke forth, and I replied, “ I have known princes begin their career as much adventurers as I was —— !” From the King’s eye I saw that all was lost if I did not mend my speech, and I added : — “ I have seen princes begin their career as much adventurers as I was, who were destined to become the greatest monarchs on the earth.”

The cloud was done away instantly, and a smile succeeded upon the countenance of the young King, while Monsieur de Turenne, who had bit his lip nearly through at the first part of my reply, drew a long breath, as if relieved by its conclusion.

“ We do not doubt your merit, sir,” answered his Majesty ; “ and as far as we ourselves

are concerned, can, of course, have no objection to your union to this young lady, not designing her for any one else. But the vast inequality of your fortunes, and the opposition of her father's nearest kinsman —— ”

“ Which I beg most strenuously to urge,” cried the cousin.

“ Do not interrupt me, sir,” said the King, sternly. “ These two circumstances offer invincible obstacles to your immediate marriage, unless you can show some motive for my disregarding the objection of this gentleman, and for believing that you are influenced by no interested motive whatever, in the attachment you declare yourself to feel towards this young lady.”

I paused in order to be sure that the King had completely finished ; but ere I could reply myself, Father Ferdinand advanced a little, and addressed the King. — “ I believe, sire,” he said, “ that the first and strongest objection is, that a gentleman calling himself the nearest male relative of the late Duke de Villardin

refuses his consent to the marriage of Monsieur de Juvigny with our ward Laura. That objection I can remove, by telling this gentleman that he is not the nearest male relative of the late Duke."

"Who, then, is?" demanded the other, fiercely.

"I am!" answered the priest, gazing sternly upon him. "I am Ferdinand de Villardin, the elder brother of the late Duke—he who, more than forty years ago, as you may have heard, young Sir, abjured the world—resigned his possessions and his rank—and, spreading abroad his own death, for twenty years buried himself in an Italian cloister. Of these facts, sire," he added, turning to the King, "I have already given you satisfactory proof; and I now declare, that the full consent of her father's nearest of kin is given to Laura de Villardin's union with him who was more than a son to her late parent."

"And in regard to my attachment to her being disinterested, sire," I added, "Take from

her all her possessions, and give me but herself—I ask no more.”

“ You think that it is impossible such a thing should happen, Monsieur de Juvigny,” answered the monarch gravely ; “ and, certainly, it is impossible that we should strip our subjects of their property ; but it is not at all impossible that another claimant to this young lady’s lands may appear, and we tell you fairly that such is the case. Not four days ago it was clearly proved to us that Mademoiselle de Villardin has no claim whatever to one acre of her father’s lands ? What say you now ? ”

“ They come not to me, my son,” said Father Ferdinand, seeing my eyes turn towards him. “ My claim upon them has been null for years.”

“ What say you now ? ” repeated the King, gazing upon me with an expectant smile.

“ That most thankfully — as the greatest boon that your Majesty can bestow,” I answered, “ as a reward for all my services, and as a tie of gratitude towards you for ever — I claim the

hand of Laura de Villardin ; and only thank Heaven, that no inequality of fortune can now make any one believe I seek her from aught but love."

A smile of majestic satisfaction beamed upon the countenance of the young monarch ; but for several moments he continued to gaze upon me without uttering a word ; and, of course, the same silence was preserved by every one in the presence. " You have stood every trial well, Monsieur de Juvigny," said the King, at length. " You have obeyed our commands at a moment when they were most difficult to obey. You have proved that your loyalty as a lover is no less perfect than your gallantry as a soldier ; and all I shall regret, in signing your marriage contract, is, that your bride will not bring you as noble a fortune as you once expected. My consent to your marriage is fully given ; there is only the approbation of one other person to be asked. Monsieur de Lorris, be good enough to open that door. What say you, madam ? Do you consent likewise ?

As he spoke, the King turned towards one of the nuns, who stood behind the Queen's chair, covered with the Ursuline veil. At the same moment Monsieur de Lorris opened a door which communicated with the great audience hall, and two more persons were instantly added to our party. They were Laura de Villardin, and, hand in hand, my little page Clement de la Marke, dressed in all the splendour of a high noble of those days, and entering with a step that seemed familiar with courtly halls.

Another sight, however, had rivetted all my attention, and, I may say, had struck me dumb, for I actually stood in the midst of the circle like a statue, without life or motion, as the nun, to whom the King had spoken, raising her veil, exposed to my sight features deeply engraved on the tablet of memory, and connected with many a sweet and many a terrible remembrance in the past. Pale and worn, but still beautiful — though more than twelve long years, loaded with grief, had passed over her

head — it was Madame de Villardin herself that gazed upon me ; and as I stood thunderstruck before her, she advanced and embraced me as her son. Clement de la Marke clung to me too — the whole truth flashed upon my mind ; and, forgetful of all else but that Laura was mine, and the dead alive again, I embraced them all in turn ; while Anne of Austria wiped away a tear, and Louis turned with a smile of generous feeling to Turenne.

“ Monsieur de Juvigny,” said the King, as soon as my first joy was somewhat moderated, “ forgive me for my *coup de théâtre* ; but I wished to have my full share in your joy and your surprise. Though your fair bride has lost the rich lands of Villardin and Dumont, which go, of course, to my young Lord Duke here, yet she is still the heiress of Vermont and De Lorris ; and her soft hand is worth a lordship in itself. Every detail has been already given to me ; and as there are some painful points in the history of every family, these good lords here present must even smother their curiosity

as best they may ; for, by my command, the many explanations which you may require will be afforded to you by your dear friends in private. You had better now retire to the hotel De Villardin ; and hereafter you will find, that, as by your high qualities you have won yourself a beautiful bride, your services have not been rendered to an ungrateful master."

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE I could well collect my senses, I was seated beside Laura de Villardin in the carriage of the good old Count de Lorris, with her young brother Clement looking playfully up in my face, which certainly must have expressed as much happiness as man could feel. On the other side appeared Madame de Villardin, with her uncle and her brother-in-law; and for a time a tumult of joyful feelings engrossed me entirely, as I looked round upon so many that I loved and esteemed, and found them all engaged in promoting my own dearest wishes. Another feeling, however, came to temper and to sadden; and I perceived that it was strong also in the bosom of every one, as, gazing upon one another, each saw a number of beloved objects, but each felt that there was one wanting who could never return.

Strange to say, where there was so much to

be asked, and so much to be told, our drive passed absolutely in silence; and Madame de Villardin, when she once more entered the dwelling in which she had spent the days of her young pride and gaiety, drew down her veil and wept. At the foot of the staircase we passed Jacques Marlot, who bowed low and reverently; and when we reached the saloon, Madame de Villardin again embraced me, saying, "God's blessing be upon you, my son, for all that you have done for me and mine. I will now leave you for a time, and our reverend brother here will give you all the details of many things that I have not spirits either to tell you myself or to hear told by another. Come with me, Laura, my beloved child; and you, Clement, betake you to your book; for the tale that your uncle is about to tell had better, in your case, be reserved for after years."

I could well have let my curiosity sleep till I had enjoyed the society of my dear Laura for some time longer; but Madame de Villardin seemed to think that the information I was to

receive had better be given at once, and, of course, I did not oppose her.

Left alone with Father Ferdinand and Monsieur de Lorris, the good priest passed over his own history without explanation, and took up his story at the period when the bridge had given way beneath Monsieur and Madame de Villardin; and he gave me all the minute particulars of events, which I can here state but generally.

It had, luckily, so happened that a large mass of the wood-work had fallen at once beneath Madame de Villardin, and thus both broke her fall into the stream, and supported her as a sort of raft after she reached the water. She had called loudly for assistance; but, hurried rapidly round the point of land just below the bridge, her voice had not reached me as I swam, till after I had dragged out Monsieur de Villardin. The single cry which I did hear had, however, caught the ears of Jacques Marlot, who was at that moment returning from the farm of the good Ursulines; and, running down to the shore, which was there less steep, he easily dragged Madame de

Villardin, and the wood-work to which she was still clinging, to land. The house which he inhabited was close at hand, and thither he himself carried the lady, without waiting for other assistance. Madame de Villardin was quite sensible of every thing around her when she arrived at his dwelling; but she had become deeply impressed with the idea that Monsieur de Villardin intended to destroy her and the child she carried in her bosom, and, acknowledging this apprehension in the terror of the moment, she besought Jacques Marlot and his wife to conceal her from pursuit. He on his part having been well accustomed, as libel-printer-general to the Fronde, to concealments of all kinds, instantly locked the door, in which state I afterwards found it, and took those measures which effectually prevented us from discovering the existence of Madame de Villardin, making his wife feign herself ill, to exclude all visiters from the house. Father Ferdinand, however, in whom Madame de Villardin had the fullest confidence, was made acquainted with the facts, under the strictest promise of secrecy; and, finding that

the unhappy lady could never again look upon her husband without terror, he it was that advised her to seek a permanent resting place in the Ursuline convent, of which she had been so munificent a benefactor.

There can be little doubt, however, that one more person became accidentally acquainted with the fate of Madame de Villardin; but she kept the secret far more nobly than might have been anticipated. That person was Suzette, who, after being dismissed from Dumont, lodged at St. Estienne, in the house of the very woman who attended Madame de Villardin in the premature birth of her son. The woman had been chosen from that village as a place in which Madame de Villardin never had been, and her name and station were carefully concealed from her; but still the whole arrangements had excited her surprise, and from the hints which Suzette had twice let fall in my presence, I could not doubt that she had gained sufficient information from her hostess, to feel sure of the existence of her former mistress. Our long absence from Du-

mont had given every opportunity of concluding all the subsequent arrangements without a chance of discovery. Madame de Villardin broke the last tie by leaving her child in the hands of Jacques Marlot at Juvigny, and retired from the world. The proximity of the convent, however, gave her frequent opportunities of seeing both her children without being known to them, and she gradually became quite reconciled to her situation. The great difficulty was in regard to the education of little Clement; but that was removed by my offer to take him as my page. The knowledge that he was near his father—and still more the tidings which she soon received that her husband was displaying towards his unknown child all the fondness of a parent—acted as balm to the wounded heart of Madame de Villardin; but still she could not banish the idea that, if the Duke ever became acquainted with the child's birth, he would seek its destruction; and nothing that Father Ferdinand could say, to show her his brother's deep grief and repentance for what had already occurred, served to relieve her

mind in this respect. Nor, indeed, could one wonder that such were her feelings, after all the terrible proofs she had received of how far her husband's unjust suspicions might carry him. All that Father Ferdinand could obtain from her, was a permission to reveal to the Duke the facts, if ever he should see him on his death-bed; but her apprehensions still made her require that the tidings should not be given till there was no remaining chance of recovery.

Such is a general outline of the explanations given to me by Father Ferdinand in regard to the preservation of Madame de Villardin; but I was still anxious to hear more, and I asked him if Laura herself had been aware of her mother's existence?

“Certainly not,” replied he; “she could not even have a suspicion of it till after that unhappy business of the Count de Laval; and here, my son,” he added, “my own conduct requires some explanation. I had long seen your growing attachment to our dear Laura, and had spoken with Madame de Villardin upon the subject, consulting her as to the necessity

of informing my brother of the evident result which would take place. From what we both knew of the natural generosity of his heart, we felt sure that he would not object to an union, which, from our own regard towards you, we both desired; and it was, therefore, determined to let things take their course. When I found from little Clement the state of deep despondency into which you had fallen, now two years ago, and the rash acts to which that despondency led you, I began to suspect that you had become aware of your own feelings towards my niece, and looked upon them as hopeless. I therefore determined to give you some hope and encouragement, especially as I knew that Laura was not destined to become that wealthy heiress which you might suppose.

“ Suddenly, however, my brother told me of his engagements with the Count; and, well aware of his rigid adherence to his word, I began to fear that your passion was without hope indeed. After you were gone from the château, and the Count had arrived, poor Laura confided to me her misery; and told me that

she would rather, at once, take the veil than wed another than yourself. As I knew her father would not himself even display a thought of drawing back from his promise, I advised her to see the Count himself, and to tell him the true state of her feelings; and then — as I had reason to believe that the Count's passion was more for the heiress than the woman — I told Laura, that a great probability existed of her father's estates passing to another; and, though I desired her to ask no farther, I believe that, from the terms in which I spoke, some suspicion of the truth crossed her mind. I bade her, as a last resource, give a hint of such a result to the Count himself, if her other representations did not move him; and then to refer him to me. She did not rest satisfied with the first, however; but after having told him plainly that she could not love him, as she loved another, she used her last resource also; although she acknowledges that he seemed much moved by her first representation. I am sorry that she did so, for now it is not very possible to tell by what motives the Count was

actuated ; and I would fain have given him an opportunity of doing honour to his own heart. However, he spoke with me afterwards ; and, knowing him to be a man upon whose promised secrecy I could fully rely, I told him boldly that there was not only a chance, but a certainty—as far as earthly things ever can be certain—of the estates of Monsieur de Villardin passing away from Laura. He asked an explanation ; and, seeing that it might save our dear girl from misery, I told him that, if I could obtain permission, I would satisfy him of the fact. — He agreed to wait four days for my communication promising, that, if I proved my statement, he would voluntarily withdraw his claim. In consequence of this arrangement, I immediately wrote to Madame de Villardin ; and, showing her that her child's happiness was at stake, demanded her leave to make the Count acquainted with so much of her story as was necessary to prove to him that Laura would never possess the estates which he expected to receive with her. She immediately consented, and the result you know. As a matter of

course, all the facts of Madame de Villardin's history were communicated by myself and Monsieur de Lorris to the King some time ago; and as her presence was necessary to establish the rights of her son to his father's honours and estates, his Majesty gave the necessary commands for removing all impediments which conventual rules might oppose to her visiting the court. Both the young King himself and his mother took the greatest interest in the fate of all concerned; and, as by your letters we received intelligence of your situation, and your restoration to health, his Majesty declared that as soon as your exchange could be effected, he would only subject you to one more trial ere he gave you your fair bride. All opposition on the part of his Eminence of Mazarine was withdrawn, as soon as he found that two thirds of Laura's estates were diverted to her brother; and yesterday morning, early, a summons to attend the King and Queen gave us also the joyful news of your return. The parts that we were all to play were laid down by the King himself; and our

poor cousin, who had come up some months ago to claim the guardianship of the young heiress, was brought in also, still in perfect ignorance of all the facts. I now need tell you no more ; and if a light step I heard but now be a true signal, I think you will find some one in that next boudoir, who, though scarcely more happy to see you than myself, is a fitter companion for a young soldier than an old priest can be."

As I, too, heard Laura's step, I asked no more questions at that time ; but, joining her that I loved, spent an hour or two of as unalloyed happiness as ever fell to the share of mortal man. But a short space now intervened ere we were united for ever ; and although all that we had gone through rendered me constantly apprehensive of some new disappointment until Laura was at length clasped to my heart, my own beloved wife, yet, since our fate has been placed beyond all farther doubt, I am inclined to believe that the dangers, and the difficulties, and even the sorrows, of our early years, contribute greatly to our present happiness.

We have a store of thoughts and remembrances in the past, which forms for us a world separated from the rest of the world : many things endured for the sake of each other, mingle, I may say, a feeling of mutual gratitude with mutual affection : the deep impression of extraordinary events keeps the first fresh feelings of the passion that was born amongst them in all its original fire, although years have passed since our fate was united. Even the memory of the beloved dead forms an inseparable tie between our hearts which can never be weakened ; and when I look into my Laura's eyes, I see the same love beaming in them as my wife, which lighted them in infancy and girlhood, only augmented with a thousand sweeter and brighter beams, by every stage through which our affection has passed.

My tale is now concluded up to this hour ; and so contented am I with my present state, that I trust to have nothing more which could prove of interest to any one to add to these pages, till time lays me in the grave. Almost all whom I have mentioned are still living ;

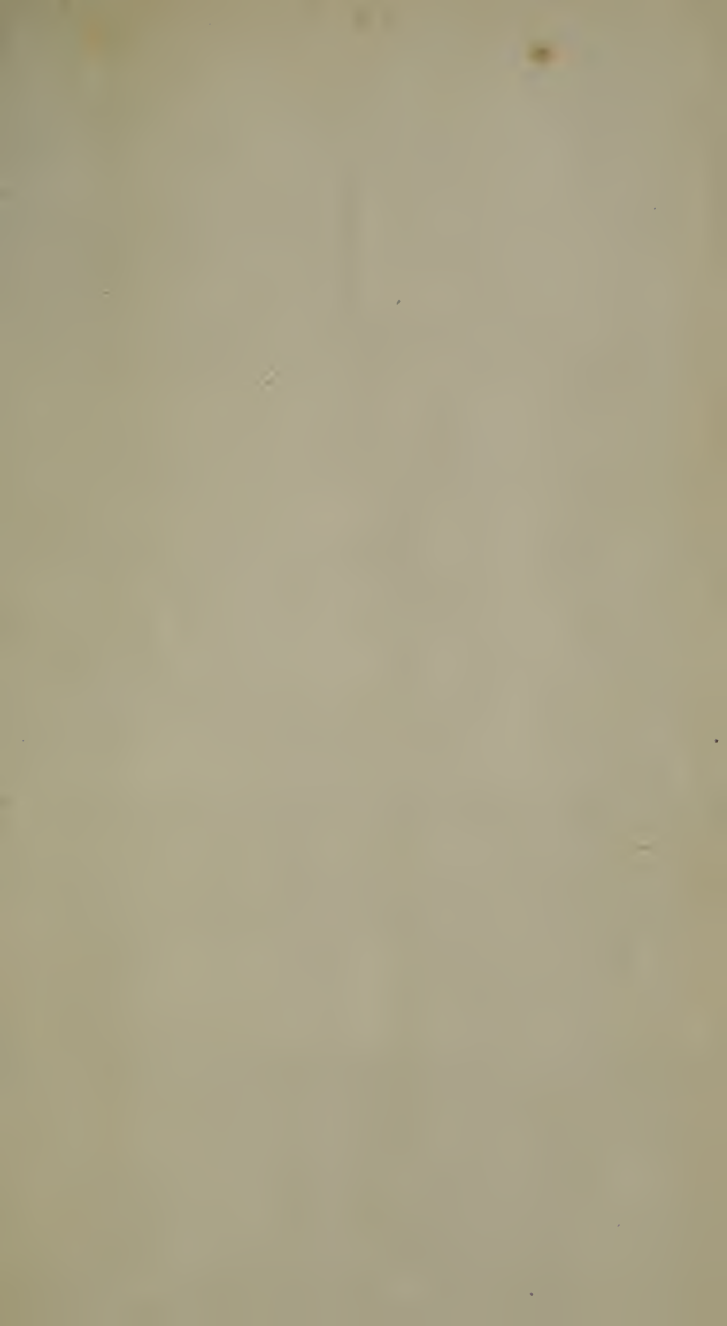
and though Madame de Villardin has again sought the quiet seclusion of the cloister, we frequently enjoy her society as far as her situation will permit. Father Ferdinand has often promised to give me a sketch of his early history ; but it would seem that there are in it points so painful, as even to have defied the softening power of time, and to remain too acute to bear recapitulation. Clement de Villardin has become the gallant soldier, whose name is known to every one both in England and France ; and I have laid by the sword which so early came into my hands, hoping that fate has exhausted her store, and that no more changes, either of station or of character, may yet be reserved for
JOHN MARSTON HALL.

THE END.

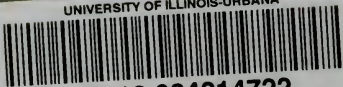
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